

SERMONS
ON
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE
W. ENFIELD, LL.D.

PREPARED FOR THE PRESS BY HIMSELF.

To which are prefixed
MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR,
By J. AIKIN, M.D.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SERMONS

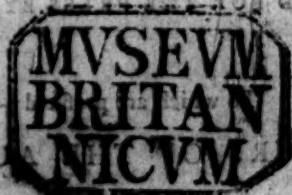
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When a Desire of pleasing becomes a
Virtue.

CONTENTS.

Great Popularity no Proof of great Merit.

**The Importance of social Harmony to the
Happiness of Life.**

PSALM cxxxiii. 5.
*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for
brethren to dwell together in unity - p. 1*

The Value of good Intentions.

2 CHRONICLES vi. 8.

*The Lord said to David my father, Foras-
much as it was in thy heart to build an
house for my name, thou didst well in that
it was in thine heart - 23*

When a Desire of pleasing becomes a
Virtue.

ROMANS xv. 2.

*Let every one of us please his neighbour for
his good to edification* - p. 44

Great Popularity no Proof of great Merit.

LUKE vi. 16.

*We will not speak well
of you* - 67

Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.

ACTS xx. 35.

*Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how
he said, It is more blessed to give than to
receive* - 88

On Meekness.

PSALM xxxvii. 11.

*The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall
delight themselves in the abundance of
peace* - 110

On

CONTENTS.

On Sensibility.

2 KINGS xxii. 19.

Thine heart was tender - p. 132

Unexpensive Methods of doing Good.

ACTS iii. 6.

Silver and gold have I none; but such as I
have give I thee 155

Animated Exertions in all laudable Un- dertakings recommended.

2 CHRONICLES xxxi. 21.

In every work that he began, he did it with
all his heart; and prospered - 176

Nathan's Reproof of David.

2 SAMUEL xii. 7.

And Nathan said unto David, Thou art
the man 200

Against

Against Lying.

PSALM cxix. 163.

I hate and abhor lying - p. 221

The Fear of Man a dangerous Snare.

PROVERBS xlii. 25.

The fear of man bringeth a snare - 245

Decorum of Character recommended.

ROMANS xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly as in the day - 263Continual Advances towards Perfection
in Knowledge and Virtue recommend-
ed.

HEBREWS vi. 1.

Let us go on to perfection - - 285

The Goodness of God to the Poor.

PSALM lxxviii. 10.

*Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness
for the poor* - - - 307

Universal

CONTENTS,

vii

Universal Obedience necessary to Salvation.

JAMES ii. 10.

Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all - - - - - p. 332

The true Ground of Juſtification.

ROMANS viii. 34.

It is God that juſtifieth: who is he that condemneth? - - - - - 353

The Wiſdom of ſuffering rather than ſinning.

I PET. iii. 14.

If ye ſuffer for righteousneſs' ſake, happy are ye - - - - - 376

Chriſtians, Sons of God.

I JOHN iii. 2, 3.

Beloved, now are we the ſons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be; but

*but we know that when he shall appear
we shall be like him, for we shall see him
as he is; and every man that hath this
hope in him purifieth himself, even as he
is pure* p. 400

The Laws of Religion not burdensome.

MICAH VI. 3.

*O my people, what have I done unto thee,
and wherein have I wearied thee? testify
against me*

The Willom of suffering rather than

1 PET. III. 14.

If ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy

Christians, Sons of God.

1 JOHN III. 2. 3.

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and
it doth not yet appear what we shall be;*

SERMONS,

SERMONS, &c.

The Importance of social Harmony to the Happiness of Life.

PSALM cxxxiii. 5.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

THAT this world is a scene of much distress and misery; that innumerable evils continually hang over us which we can neither prevent nor foresee; that hope frequently ends in disappointment, and pleasure in disgust; are truths which every age and country has anxiously repeated, and to which every human heart

2 *The Importance of Social Harmony*

has borne its sad testimony. Such an impression, indeed, have these considerations sometimes made upon persons of a gloomy and discontented temper, that they have been ready to ask why the Almighty has made man—for what purpose a creature, burdened with so many imperfections, and exposed to so many calamities, has been called into being?

To these murmurs Religion replies, that the present life is only a small part of human existence; that this world is merely a place of discipline and trial, where, by means of those very sufferings which are the subject of complaint, we are to be fitted for a future state of eternal and ever-increasing felicity. And this consideration is undoubtedly, above all others, the most effectual to console us under the unavoidable evils of humanity, and to vindicate the ways of God to man.

But, besides this, it may be reasonably urged, in refutation of the complaints of discontent,

discontent, that human life is not really so full of wretchedness as it is sometimes represented to be; and that it would be much happier than it is at present, if every individual did his part towards rendering it as comfortable to himself and others as it is capable of being made. Let us cast our eyes around upon the world in which God has placed us, and observe whether, in the constitution of nature, he has in any degree discovered inattention to our wants, or has provided with a sparing hand for our comfort and gratification. How full of beauty is the varied scene of the creation! how admirably framed to delight the sense, and fill the contemplative mind with rapture! With what profusion does the earth pour forth its stores for us, and for all animated beings! How kindly is it ordained that the means of supporting our lives should be sources of pleasure; and that our necessities themselves, which make us feel the wants and weaknesses of our nature,

4 *The Importance of social Harmony*

should put us upon exertions salutary to our health and friendly to enjoyment! In making man a social being, whose nature leads him to seek aid and comfort from union with his fellow-creatures, what a boundless store of happiness of the highest kind has his Creator laid before him! If man pervert the social propensities of his nature into a spring of uneasiness and disquiet, surely the blame must lie wholly upon himself.

“How good and how pleasant,” says the text, “is it for brethren to dwell together in unity!” intimating, not only that life may be *endured*, and many of its evils avoided, by such conduct, but that it may become actually and positively a state of felicity: a sentiment which perfectly agrees with the common idea of the benevolent part of mankind, who are ready on every occasion to exclaim—“What a happy world would this be, if all men loved each other!” In truth, if from the sum of evil which exists in
the

the world we take away those afflictions which men bring upon themselves by misconduct, and those which they inflict upon others by the indulgence of the mischievous passions of envy, hatred, malice, and cruelty, so little will be left, that the most discontented man would be ashamed to put it in competition with the many good things which the bounty of our Creator has bestowed upon us. The inclemencies of winter are overbalanced by the grateful warmth and serenity of the other seasons. Years of barrenness bear a small proportion to those of fertility. Compared with health, disease, not the offspring of intemperance, is unfrequent. Storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, are uncommon occurrences; and after their worst ravages, the smiling face of nature is soon renewed. If, then, to this manifest preponderance of good in the natural world, man should, as he might, add an equal or a greater balance of moral good; if all the rational inhabitants of the earth

6 *The Importance of social Harmony*

were heartily to unite in making the most of their situation, and particularly in improving to the best advantage their connexions with each other, there would no longer be any plea for complaining of this world as a barren wilderness, or for supposing, as some have done, that man is on the whole a loser by his elevated rank in the creation.

It will be wholly unnecessary to use many words in order to shew how necessary brotherly love and unity are to the happiness both of great and small communities. We need look no further than among our own immediate acquaintance to be satisfied, that domestic harmony or discord is of more weight in the scale of social happiness or misery than all other circumstances taken together. Who can pass a day without feeling the justness of Solomon's observation—"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith?" Pleasures and pains of this kind are strongly felt by individuals,

individuals, and have a powerful tendency to diffuse themselves. A glad and benevolent countenance indicating a mind pleased with itself and with all around it, sheds beams of joy and satisfaction on a whole circle. On the contrary, a lowering brow denoting anger, discontent, and ill-will, blasts the pleasures of a whole circle, even though met for the purpose of festivity. Nor does it fare better with the malevolent being himself than with the victims of his spite and ill-humour. If there be within the compass of human depravity such a thing as the pleasure of tormenting, it can only be a temporary respite from internal anguish, and must ever be succeeded by the horrors of remorse and self-condemnation. That tyrant, who said of his people—"Let them hate me, provided they fear me," never, we may be assured, felt one easy or happy moment. A greater punishment could not be inflicted upon any rational being than that he should be rendered incapable

8 *The Importance of social Harmony*

of loving; nor can a more lively idea be formed of the wretchedness, as well as the depravity, of the prince of evil demons, than that suggested by the poet, when he makes him say—"Evil, be thou my good."

It may perhaps be said, that the malignant passions, hurtful as they are to the peace and happiness of mankind, are yet natural; and that, as long as the several inclinations and interests of mankind continue to thwart each other as they do at present, there is little reason to expect that the world will ever become that scene of universal love and kindness which is so much to be desired. But in reply to this—which, by the way, is an objection that lies equally against all attempts to improve our nature in any other respect—it can only be necessary to appeal to facts. Let those who are disposed to think and speak thus despairingly of human nature, observe whether there is not in reality a great difference among mankind with respect

spect to the terms on which they live with one another, and the degree of peace and unity which they maintain in their social connexions. Look around among families, and remark whether, in the *conjugal* relation, you do not see some persons continually vexing and provoking each other by contentions on the most trifling subjects, and hereby making their home intolerable to themselves, and to all who are connected with them; while others, by mutual compliances, kind offices, and words and looks of love, render their union the happiest of all human ties. Again, with respect to the relation between *parents* and *children*, is it not in some families, by tyranny and sternness on the one side, and disobedience and ill-humour on the other, rendered a source of the bitterest vexation; whilst, in others, the kind and gentle rule of the parents, repaid by the affectionate attachment and willing obedience of the children, produces the sweetest delights and dearest

10 *The Importance of social Harmony*

dearest comforts? In the connexion between *brothers* and *sisters*, and the various branches of kindred, is it not continually seen that *some*, the nearer they are brought by nature, are set the more distant in affection through little jealousies, and petty jars and rivalships; whilst *others*, drawn close by the bands of love as well as of relationship, dwell together in that firm union which, amidst the vicissitudes of this world, will prove the surest support in adversity, as well as the fairest ornament and dearest comfort of prosperity? Of those who are associated by *situation* and *employment*, such as partners in business, fellow-labourers, or fellow-servants, do not some appear to make it their study to render each other's lives as uncomfortable as possible by all kinds of vexations and ill-offices; while others take pleasure in lightening their common burdens, and sweetening their common toils, by mutual cheerfulness and good-humour, and by reciprocal acts of kind
assistance

assistance and service? In the more extended relations of neighbours, townsmen, and fellow-citizens, the same contrast is observable between those who treat each other as rivals and enemies, and those who regard one another as friends and brethren.

Since, then, examples so abundant are perpetually before us of the mischief and deformity of hatred and contention, and of the beauty and advantage of love and concord; and since it cannot be asserted that it is not in the power of men, if they choose it, to "dwell together in unity," we have certainly no right to complain of the evils of life till we have done our part to remove this principal source of them. Would we find a heaven upon earth, let us at least bring no bad and malignant passions to disturb its felicity; let us not join in creating the evils we lament; but rather engage with all our might in making the noble experiment how nearly this state of being, imperfect as it is, may be brought

12 *The Importance of social Harmony*

brought to resemble that glorious and happy state hereafter, to the blessings of which we all aspire. We may be assured, that such an attempt to anticipate the felicities of heaven will be the most effectual method of preparing ourselves for the actual enjoyment of them.

And we have every encouragement to hope, that a sincere and hearty endeavour to amend ourselves and others in this respect will be attended with considerable success. The spirit of benevolence has frequently been diffused over large societies of men, and has in fact produced among them the happy fruits which were to be expected. It was evidently the leading purpose of the Author of our religion to inculcate this spirit in its greatest force and purity. The *new commandment* which he gave his followers was, "that they should love one another." The first ages of the christian church afforded many delightful examples of mutual affection and unanimity. "See, how these Christians
love

love one another," was the exclamation of their enemies, when they observed the harmony which subsisted among them in the midst of their sufferings. And if the simple and beneficent institution of christianity, long since debased by the mixture of state policy, mystery, and bigotry, has been incapable of exerting, to the fullest extent, its divine influence in harmonizing the tempers and softening the manners of men; yet no age has passed in which its genuine characters have not been strikingly displayed in individuals, in which its power has not been in some degree visible in communities. The brotherly love which has cemented various of its sects, has been, and still is, remarkable; and we may observe in our own country a pleasing example of its prevalence in that community which distinguishes itself by no other title than that of *friends*. If the spirit of peace and unity has among them done much towards extinguishing public and private

14 *The Importance of Social Harmony*

private contention, family quarrels, law-suits, and party animosities; if it has bound them together, like members of one household, mutually aiding and comforting each other under worldly losses and distresses of every kind, why should not other christian societies, and indeed the whole race of mankind, adopt a temper so manifestly tending to improve the condition of human beings here on earth?

But to us as individuals, whose situation affords us little opportunity of introducing changes in the conduct and opinions of men in general, the great concern is to rectify our own hearts, and afford good examples to the small circle with which we are connected. I shall, therefore, in the remainder of this discourse, offer a few observations concerning the best means of improving ourselves in that happy temper, the effects of which are the subject of the Psalmist's exclamation in the text.

Our

Our state in this life, my brethren, resembles that of passengers in a crowded street. Every one, pursuing the way in which business or pleasure leads him, meets with obstacles and interruptions from others bent upon the same errand. If all resolve to keep their road directly onward, without the least attention to others, neither yielding a little to let them pass, nor regulating their steps and motions in some correspondence with those of the rest, universal confusion must ensue, and none will be able to advance with tolerable speed. Whereas, if every one attends a little to the accommodation of his neighbour as well as his own, and complies with such rules as are laid down for the general advantage, all may proceed with reasonable convenience and expedition. In the march of life, no one's path lies so clear as not in some degree to cross another's; and if each is determined, with unyielding sturdiness, to keep his own line, it is impossible but he

16 *The Importance of Social Harmony*

he must both give and receive many a rude shock.

It appears, then, that the most essential step towards general harmony and unity is, that all of us should accustom ourselves to the controul of that *selfish* spirit which seeks its own gratification at the expence of the rest of mankind. As it is impossible that our inclinations and desires should not frequently interfere with those of others; if each be not prepared to give up somewhat of his own humour, and to consult the pleasure and convenience of others as well as of himself, how can he with any reason expect their friendship and good offices? It is true, that in some cases an appearance of tranquillity and harmony has been produced by a very rigorous plan of subordination, in which every one yields implicit obedience to the will of his superior, and in his turn exacts the same from his inferior. But what is this but a commerce between tyrants and slaves, unworthy of the dignity of human nature,

nature, and utterly destructive of true brotherly affection! The bond of such a union can be nothing but fear; and it cannot have the least tendency to mend the heart and inspire generous sentiments. Love subsists only by mutual kindnesses and compliances: its basis is that principle of equality which ought ever in some degree to reign between man and man, however unequal be their condition in life. No one has a right to demand that another should in every case give up his inclination to his own. It is only as a benefactor that he can justly require any sacrifice of this kind; and it is only by acts of love, as well as service, that he can expect to obtain the return of being beloved.

Nor is it in matters of importance alone that mutual attentions and accommodations are necessary in order to preserve the spirit of concord, and enable brethren, kindred, and neighbours, to dwell together in unity. Life is composed chiefly

18 *The Importance of social Harmony*

of small things; and it is in reality of more importance to attend to the causes of pleasure and pain which every day may bring forth, than to those which years are requisite to produce. Hence it will appear, that the quality called civility, or politeness, is of more consequence both to our virtue and happiness than is generally apprehended. We are apt, in this country especially, to annex to it the idea of something false and artificial; but if true politeness be defined, "an attention to please, by giving up our own inclinations to those of other persons," there seems nothing in it which ought to exclude it from the rank of the social virtues; and though it is exercised chiefly in smaller concerns, yet the habit formed by it will extend to matters of greater consequence. The love of self is so domineering a principle in our nature, that it cannot have too many counterpoises. If it be acknowledged, as it undoubtedly must, that with the exterior forms of politeness it is possible

possible to have a very selfish heart, it is also true, that so far as these forms go, they render the commerce of life more agreeable; and it is better that a man should by their influence be led to yield in some particulars, than that he should consult nothing but his own will and gratification in every point. We generally see, in fact, that where a man prides himself in rejecting all the attentions of politeness as trifling and unmanly, he falls into gross brutality, and plainly shows, in every action of life, that he prefers himself to all mankind.

The principle of consulting the feelings of others as well as our own takes a wide scope, and extends to many things which we are too apt to disregard. It not only enjoins us to relinquish to our associates a fair share of the ordinary gratifications and indulgences of life, but to treat their sentiments and opinions with proper deference; to allow them the same freedom of speech which we ourselves

20 *The Importance of social Harmony*

assume; and on no occasion to say or do any thing which may give them pain, unless urged to it by some motive of superior duty. How often does a severe, though witty sarcasm, or a spiteful insinuation, wound another to the heart, and cause breaches in friendship that can never be repaired! What more fatally blasts the peace of society than the breath of slander! and how is every injury of this kind aggravated, when it proceeds from those whom we love and respect? How sensibly did the Psalmist feel this, when he exclaimed—*It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me, then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, mine equal, my guide, and my acquaintance.*" Whenever we feel ourselves tempted to offend in these points, let us directly put the case home, and ask ourselves how we should relish such treatment? We can-
20
not

not then err for want of knowing better; we shall then be sensible that what at distance, and when it regarded another, we might deem trifling and not worth attention, when applied to ourselves appears of real importance. And let us remember, that every thing *is* of importance which concerns the happiness of a fellow-creature.

To conclude—If any of us were informed of a method by which our worldly possessions might, without injustice, be at once doubled, how void of sense and reason should we be thought if we refused to pay attention to it!—Brethren, the method is, in effect, in every one's hands. By “dwelling together in unity,” the comfort and pleasure of life would be more than doubled, and this without any hazard or difficulty. It is an attempt, too, in which no one can entirely fail of success. If he cures his own bad passions only, he takes away one cause of strife in the circle to which he belongs; and the

fiercest fire may be prevented from spreading by withdrawing what would feed it: at the same time, he secures to himself a habit and state of mind which will afford him peace and serenity in the midst of the most violent storms of surrounding contention.

May the God of love and peace grant that we may all, in our several domestic and civil relations, experience "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Amen!

The

The Value of good Intentions.

2 CHRONICLES vi. 8.

The Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thy heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart.

NOTHING can be of greater importance to the right conduct of life, and to our happiness both in this world and in the world to come, than the judicious choice and application of general principles and maxims, by which the course of our actions and the decisions of our consciences are to be directed. If these be founded on reason and the nature of things, and

withal be rightly applied, we proceed upon firm and secure grounds: but if they be either false in themselves, or if a wrong application be made of them in particular cases, we may be led into errors of conduct before we are aware; we may involve ourselves in guilt and wretchedness, whilst we imagine ourselves to be pursuing the path of innocence and safety; and thus may learn, by fatal experience, the truth of Solomon's observation—"There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death."

Among the many delusive maxims by which men are too ready to lull their consciences into false repose, and to "speak peace to themselves while there is no peace," this is one, that the Almighty accepts of the will for the deed, and where the heart is well disposed, overlooks the irregularities and vices of the life. This doctrine, which in a certain sense and under proper restrictions is a real and important truth, when universally taken,

taken, and applied to all mankind in every situation and circumstance of life, becomes a pernicious error. It may, therefore, be useful to us to examine the nature and foundation of this maxim, and inquire how far it is supported by reason, and in what respects it is frequently misunderstood and misapplied.

And our text will naturally lead us to the consideration of this subject. It informs us, that though David was not permitted to execute the pious purpose which he had formed of building a magnificent temple to the honour of Jehovah, yet his good intention was in itself acceptable to the Lord, and obtained his express approbation. But it appears from the particulars of the narrative, that it was only because the Lord did not require David to build him an house that his pious intention, although never executed, was approved and commended, and that the Lord said unto him—"Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house to
my

my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart." Had Solomon, who was appointed to perform this service, declined it on account of the difficulty and expence which must attend so great a work, it would not have been admitted as an excuse, much less would it have been spoken of in his *praise*, that it was in his heart to build a temple to the Lord.

That the pretence of a good intention will never be accepted by the Almighty without correspondent actions, excepting only those cases in which a man is incapable of executing his desires and purposes, not only appears from the incident to which the text relates, but may be plainly inferred from the general language of scripture. In these sacred records of the divine will, the active obedience of a good life, that piety which consists, not in empty speculations or ineffectual purposes, but in an actual conformity to all the laws of God, is every where required. We are there taught, that

that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and that not every one who saith, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of our Father who is in heaven. Our Saviour hath said—"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them:" and again—"Do this, and live." And the apostle John hath given us this solemn warning—"Let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous."

Nor is the necessity of this limitation less evident from the reason of the thing. For what is it which constitutes the essence of a virtuous character? It is doubtless this, the sincere intention and determined resolution of the mind to do that which, upon mature examination, it judges to be right. Now, it is essential to a real purpose and volition that it produces correspondent actions, where there is no insuperable external hindrance. When the will commands, every other
power

power of body and mind obeys, as far as they are able. Of this every one is sensible, that whenever we see a man whose actions are not conformable to his professions and promises, as far as external circumstances will permit, we immediately conclude him to be insincere and hypocritical. We can never suppose that man to have a real intention of serving us, and value him as our friend, how liberal soever he may be in declarations of attachment to our persons and zeal for our interest, who time after time neglects opportunities of serving us: and the case is the same with respect to the Supreme Judge of actions, the great Searcher of hearts. Though it is true, that an honest and upright intention is the quality which he principally regards, and which will in the first place obtain his approbation; yet, since he knows that sincerity of intention cannot subsist without a correspondent conduct, he must be displeased with all pretensions to integrity of heart which

which are not supported and confirmed by goodness of life. The man, for example, who is a slave to the turbulent passion of anger, or to intemperance and excess, may indeed find means to persuade himself that in his heart he hates these vices, and sincerely resolves to forsake them, and that his frequent relapses are not owing to any depravity of mind, but to the unavoidable imperfection of his nature: but his specious pretences to repentance and uprightness cannot impose upon the more judicious of his fellow-creatures, much less can they impose upon the Supreme Being:

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” The whole man is obedient to the command of the will. Where there is no obstruction from external causes, it is therefore as absurd to suppose sincere intentions without correspondent actions, as it would be to attempt to separate the shadow from the substance. He who determines to do
any

any thing, if it be in his power, will certainly do it. It is then most evident, that no man can be possessed of that uprightness of intention which is the essence of virtue, and which alone is acceptable to God, whose actions are not conformable to his resolutions; and that there can be no other exception to this than that which happened in the case referred to in the text, when external circumstances are such that it is not in a man's power to execute his intentions.

Thus much may suffice to show in what sense, and how far, it may be expected that good intentions will be accepted by God in the room of good actions.

But, because men are exceedingly apt to flatter and delude themselves by misunderstanding and misapplying the doctrine suggested in the text, I shall endeavour more particularly to show wherein this misapplication consists: and it consists, I apprehend, chiefly in these two things, that men look upon that to be a
sincere

sincere intention which is not such, and that they esteem many things impracticable which are really within their power.

It is, perhaps, no uncommon thing to mistake that approbation and love of virtue which is natural to the human mind for uprightness of heart and intention. There is, doubtless, in every man, a principle of conscience which leads him to approve of those dispositions and actions which are in themselves right and good. Virtue is so beautiful in itself, and so beneficial to mankind, that, even among the most vicious and abandoned, it must obtain some share of respect. This is an homage which nature requires every man to pay to this lovely form: but it is a dangerous mistake to confound the approbation of virtue with the actual choice of a virtuous course of life. Thousands there are who, whilst they feel the former, are wholly strangers to the latter; and there is no man whose own experience has not taught him, that to ap-

prove of an action, and actually to choose and perform it, are very different things.

Farther, many persons, probably, imagine that they are possessed of upright and virtuous intentions, and that their hearts are right in the sight of God, because they sometimes earnestly desire, and in solemn forms of worship express their purpose, to forsake their evil ways, and pursue the paths of wisdom and virtue: but let it be remembered, that the bare desire of any thing falls far short of that stedfast and determined resolution which leads to the diligent use of the means by which it is to be obtained; and that no man is ever heartily disposed towards reformation till he actually sets about it. The most profligate and licentious wish to be happy; and because their understandings and consciences teach them that virtue is the only road to happiness, they may, in some intervals of sober reflection, wish to be good. But a man might as well expect to make himself master of the whole

circle of science, or to rise to universal empire, by a wish, as imagine that a faint desire and feeble purpose of reformation will make him a good man. Balaam said—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his." He wished to share the happiness of the good man, but he could not prevail upon himself to practise the virtues by which alone it was to be obtained. All his wishes were insufficient to induce him to relinquish the wages of unrighteousness; still he chose to lead the life of the wicked, and doubtless at last died his death—died a sad witness of this truth, that "idle wishes profit nothing."

But I proceed to observe, that men not only mistake the nature of uprightness of intention, but frequently imagine that to be impracticable which is in fact far otherwise.

When any duty is attended with considerable difficulties, we are too ready to excuse ourselves from performing it, by

prove of an action, and actually to choose and perform it, are very different things.

Farther, many persons, probably, imagine that they are possessed of upright and virtuous intentions, and that their hearts are right in the sight of God, because they sometimes earnestly desire, and in solemn forms of worship express their purpose, to forsake their evil ways, and pursue the paths of wisdom and virtue: but let it be remembered, that the bare desire of any thing falls far short of that stedfast and determined resolution which leads to the diligent use of the means by which it is to be obtained; and that no man is ever heartily disposed towards reformation till he actually sets about it. The most profligate and licentious wish to be happy; and because their understandings and consciences teach them that virtue is the only road to happiness, they may, in some intervals of sober reflection, wish to be good. But a man might as well expect to make himself master of the whole

circle of science, or to rise to universal empire, by a wish, as imagine that a faint desire and feeble purpose of reformation will make him a good man. Balaam said—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his." He wished to share the happiness of the good man, but he could not prevail upon himself to practise the virtues by which alone it was to be obtained. All his wishes were insufficient to induce him to relinquish the wages of unrighteousness; still he chose to lead the life of the wicked, and doubtless at last died his death—died a sad witness of this truth, that "idle wishes profit nothing."

But I proceed to observe, that men not only mistake the nature of uprightness of intention, but frequently imagine that to be impracticable which is in fact far otherwise.

When any duty is attended with considerable difficulties, we are too ready to excuse ourselves from performing it, by

34 *The Value of good Intentions*

pleading that it is beyond our strength. No man knows what he is capable of doing till he makes the trial. Many persons have surprised, not only the world, but even themselves, when great occasions have called forth their latent powers and virtues. We have, therefore, no right, in cases of difficulty, to satisfy ourselves, or to expect that the Supreme Judge of characters will be satisfied with the plea of incapacity before we have made the experiment. Besides, it hath been justly observed, that idleness creates impossibilities. When we are disinclined to any duty, we magnify in our imagination the difficulties which are likely to attend it, till at length we persuade ourselves that they are insurmountable. Hence it is most probable that we are generally mistaken, when we apprehend that we may be excused from attempting any difficult service because we want the power to perform it.

It is, likewise, no unusual thing for men

men to endeavour to persuade themselves that those parts of their duty are impracticable which are attended with great and manifest danger. We are too ready to act as if we thought that danger absolved us from duty. When the interests of our friends, the welfare of our country, or the cause of virtue, calls for our vigorous support under circumstances of peculiar hazard, our courage fails, and we desert the dangerous post. But this can surely be no sufficient excuse in the judgment of impartial reason, or before the tribunal of heaven. If the prospect of suffering could free us from the obligation of obeying, what is the import of those commands of our Saviour which require us to take up the cross and follow him? If, when the path of virtue is overspread with the thorns of persecution, we are at liberty to turn aside into the flowery paths of vice, wherefore did the primitive heroes of the christian church patiently endure the trial of cruel mockings and

scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment, of torture and death? and wherefore is their reward great in the kingdom of heaven? Wherefore did Jesus Christ drink the bitter cup which was appointed him, and with unparalleled fortitude give himself up into the hands of his enemies? and wherefore hath God highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name? Let no one imagine that those circumstances of difficulty can excuse him from acts of obedience, or render them impracticable, to which many illustrious characters have been indebted for the honourable distinction with which their names have been transmitted to posterity.

Men are, moreover, frequently disposed to make use of the plea of impracticability when their duty requires them to perform acts of liberality. "If a brother or sister," saith the apostle James, "be naked, and destitute of daily food, and ye say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye

ye filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?" And yet how frequently do we see the sons of avarice treating their poor and afflicted brethren in this manner! If benevolent wishes and kind words could do them any service, of these they are sufficiently liberal; but for any thing farther, alas! it is beyond their power. Their necessary expences are so great, their gains are so uncertain, and their opportunity of providing against a future day is so small, that they cannot devote any part of their substance to the purposes of charity. Thus they oblige the poor to accept of the will for the deed, and they flatter themselves that the Almighty will do the same. Vain and presumptuous expectation! His eye penetrates through the thin veil which they cast over their avarice, and although this covering should at present be sufficient to conceal it from the world, and even from them-

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selves, the time is coming when their true characters will be exposed to view, and they will be condemned as wicked and slothful servants.

The last instance I shall mention, in which men are apt to imagine that a good intention will be accepted by God in the room of good actions, on account of the impossibility of executing their purpose, is that of overcoming long established habits of vice. The passionate man pleads, that he has so long given way to his natural inhumanity, that he will not now admit of constraint. The drunkard and the voluptuary will urge, in excuse for continuing their vicious practices, that after having so long indulged their appetites without constraint, it is too late to forbear when it must be ineffectual. By these pretences of incapacity they may, perhaps, not only hope to excuse themselves to others, but obtain some kind of relief to their own minds under the consciousness of guilt. They

are, however, all the while, labouring under a fatal delusion. To conquer bad habits may be difficult; it may be like cutting off the right hand, or plucking out the right eye; yet still it is possible. Whilst a man enjoys the use of his rational faculties; whilst Conscience possesses her seat in his breast; whilst the Almighty is "waiting to be gracious," and encourages sinners to return unto him by the promise of his free pardon, the wicked "may forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Let no man then say—"There is no hope: I have loved my vices, and after them will I go." Let no man presume that the difficulty of conquering his vicious habits will excuse his continuing in subjection to them, or imagine that the Almighty will accept of faint wishes, feeble resolutions, and a partial reformation, in the room of sincere repentance, and a thorough change of heart and life. Think not that it will be enough that it hath

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been

been in your heart to turn to the Lord, but actually put away the evil of your doings from before his eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well: for the same authority which hath said, "It shall be well with the righteous, for he shall reap the fruit of his doings," hath also declared, "It shall be ill with the wicked, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

From what hath been advanced in this discourse, it plainly appears, my brethren, that the doctrine suggested in the text speaks no peace to the man who wishes to substitute good intentions in the room of good actions. It is, however, full of comfort to the sincerely virtuous; and let all such apply to themselves the consolation which it is calculated to afford them.

You cannot, perhaps, contribute so largely to the relief of your afflicted brethren, or extend the fruits of your liberality through so wide a circle, as you wish,

wish. As far as you are able, you "shew mercy with cheerfulness;" and your benevolent sentiments and good wishes flow without restraint towards all your fellow-creatures: but your condition and rank in life, and the real necessities which press upon you, oblige you to confine your actual charity within narrow limits. Assure yourself that your smallest offering on the altar of Humanity will be acceptable to him who "loveth a cheerful giver;" nay, that even the sigh of pity, and the tear of sympathy, will obtain their reward. The two mites which the poor widow cast into the treasury were not rejected.

In the season of affliction, when you are labouring under grievous pains of body, the loss of friends, disappointment in your affairs, or other heavy calamities, you may, perhaps, lament the infirmity of your nature, and be disposed to blame yourself that you do not support your burden with greater fortitude. In circumstances like these,

these; comfort yourself with the reflection, that the Almighty doth not require you to suppress the emotions of nature: he expects you to bear affliction as a christian, but he allows you to feel it as a man. As a father pitieth his children; so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.

In fine, you are, perhaps, daily regretting your deficiency in many parts of the christian temper and character; and in the midst of a course of sincere obedience to the will of God, are conscious of so many occasional deviations from the path of duty, or of such imperfection in your moral and religious attainments, that you are apprehensive lest, after all your most faithful, upright, and diligent exertions, you should fail of obtaining the divine approbation. Banish all such gloomy apprehensions from your minds. Your heart is right in the sight of God, and you sincerely and constantly endeavour

endeavour to preserve a conscience void of offence, and to go on towards perfection. It is enough; your happiness is secure; your virtue shall not go without its reward: for "where there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,"

ROMANS XV. 13.
Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.
In the present state of human nature, it is not only criminal for any one to attempt to live to himself, but in the nature of things impossible, that any one should ever accomplish it. Dependence as we necessarily are upon one another for the very means of subsistence, as well as for most of the comforts of life, we might as well attempt to live without air as to enjoy life without
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**-When a Desire of pleasing be-
comes a Virtue.**

ROMANS XV. 2.

*Let every one of us please his neighbour for
his good to edification.*

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without

without the kind offices of others. To despise the good-will, and to reject the services, of those with whom nature and society have connected us, would be as weak and foolish as it would be petulant and churlish.

There is, then, no merit in the mere act of pleasing our neighbour; for every prudent man will do it for his own convenience and interest. That our attention to the inclinations of others may be virtuous, or even innocent, we must rescue it from the dominion of that selfishness which endeavours to attract every thing to its own center, and must submit it to the regulation of that charity which seeketh not its own profit, and learn, in obedience to the apostolic precept of the text, "every one of us to please his neighbour," not for our own security or emolument, but "for *his* good unto edification."

The world, in its present artificial and polished state, abounds with polite atten-

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tion and civility. It is a kind of current coin, which almost every man is disposed to pay, and expects in his turn to receive, but which few persons give themselves the trouble to bring to the standard of christian benevolence. As far as concerns the ordinary purposes of society, it is perhaps as well that we should not be over-scrupulous in examining the intrinsic value of the payments which are daily made in this currency; for it would certainly be a great interruption of the course of exchange, and might possibly lead to some disagreeable discoveries and painful detections. But when we consider the subject in a moral and religious light, it appears of the utmost moment that we should not mistake that hollow civility which means nothing, or that hypocritical affectation of attention and kindness which means worse than nothing, for that generous desire to please which looks beyond itself, and seeks as its ultimate end another's gratification and benefit.

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Taking the precept of the text for our guide, let us follow the desire of pleasing through the principal forms which it takes, and observe in what manner it becomes criminal, innocent, merely prudent, or highly meritorious, as it recedes from or approaches towards the rule which requires us to "please our neighbour for his good to edification."

It is possible to conceive cases—perhaps it may not be difficult to find them in real life—in which attempts to please, proceeding from a base principle, and directed towards an unworthy end, are highly criminal. Have ye never seen or heard of artful villains who have had the address to captivate the affections and win the confidence of the young or the weak, till they have engaged them, under plausible appearances and fair promises, in schemes or connexions which have soon transferred their possessions to the hands of their rapacious plunderers? Have ye never met with men who have concealed the most
licentious

licentious principles and profligate spirit, under the specious disguise of gentle manners, and by the almost irresistible attractions of gaiety and good-humour, insinuated themselves into the hearts of unsuspecting youth, for the vile purposes of corrupting their innocence, and leading them into the destructive paths of vice? Have ye never known a base seducer—a cruel spoiler—who has been accomplished only to deceive, and has pleased only to betray? In such instances, you have had the fullest proof that the power, and even the desire, of pleasing, is a dangerous quality, where it is employed by selfishness in the service of avarice, or any other criminal passions.

Such mischievous imposture, under so fair a form, must, as soon as it is discovered, excite indignation and abhorrence in the breasts of all good men. In other cases, where the evils arising from hypocritical appearances of good-nature and civility are of a more general or less se-

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rious nature, they only serve to raise in noble minds the feelings of contempt. A fawning sycophant, courting the smiles of his superior by expressions of respect which are foreign from his heart; a cringing dependant, not daring to contradict the opinion or thwart the humour of one to whom he looks up with the greedy eye of expectation; a timid slave to avarice, meekly surrendering his judgment to the peremptory decision of a man whose best title to decide is his wealth; an artful pretender to gentleness and civility before the world, whilst his domestics and dependents know, to their cost, that nothing is farther from his real disposition than a desire to please and be pleased—these every one will acknowledge to be despicable characters.

Nor can they escape some share of blame and contempt, who, through too solicitous an attention to their own interest or safety, shrink back from the post of duty, rather than hazard the dis-

pleasure of those whom they ought to censure or reprove. To withhold from a friend that admonition which might save him from disgrace or ruin; to be silent when offences against religion or decorum call aloud for rebuke; to acquiesce in decisions which we judge highly injurious to the cause of truth; or to be a patient hearer of insults offered to an innocent character, through a cowardly apprehension of giving offence, betrays a degree of pusillanimity and irresolution which cannot be justified on any plea of politeness or prudence.

In the cases hitherto enumerated, and in all others in which we attend to the inclinations and indulge the humours of another, merely for the sake of courting his interest or conciliating his affections, and hereby rendering him the easy instrument of our avarice or other criminal passions, or in which our only motive in gratifying another is to escape the performance of some unpleasant or hazardous duty,

duty, the desire of pleasing, on account of the selfish principle which dictates it, ceases to be laudable, or even innocent, and becomes in a greater or less degree culpable.

There are other cases in which the desire of pleasing being neither prompted by any criminal passion nor by any virtuous sentiment, but merely by prudence or politeness, assumes the character of indifference. When a man who has no unworthy ends to accomplish, nor any guilty desires to gratify, is attentive to the inclinations, and conforms to the taste and manners, of those with whom he is connected, merely for the purpose of gaining their good-will, and thus, without any sacrifice of innocence or integrity, effectually provides for his own tranquillity, and promotes his own interest, we may indeed call him prudent and discreet, but we must not, in this part of his character, allow him any higher merit. Though his easy temper

and obliging behaviour may, in fact, be productive of benefit to society; since he intends nothing but his own convenience, he has no claim to the praise of doing good. In like manner, we must rank in this middle class all those attentions to the established forms of good-breeding which proceed from no higher motive than a desire of being well received in the polite world. There are forms of this kind, established by general consent in every civilised country, which are first introduced into the higher ranks of society, as the peculiar badge by which they are distinguished from the vulgar, and which afterwards, as society improves, pass down into the inferior orders of the people, and produce a general decency of manners which greatly contributes to the comfort of life. In an highly cultivated state of society, no man can wholly neglect these forms without either degrading himself to a place among the lowest vulgar, or incurring ridicule for his affectation of singularity.

singularity. It is not, therefore, wonderful that we see so general an attention to the common rules of civility in the middle and even in the lower, as well as in the higher, walks of life. And so many advantages accrue to mankind in general from this universal interchange of polite attentions, that we may justly allow it no inconsiderable value, as the cement of good order, without too nicely inquiring whether, in any particular instance, it be the effect of vanity, of mere custom, or of a benevolent temper. But if we wish to judge, with respect to ourselves, concerning the degree of moral merit which attends our ordinary expressions of civility, this inquiry becomes necessary; for it is only where these forms are observed from an habitual inclination to promote the comfort and pleasure of others, independently of all considerations of personal interest, that courtesy becomes a virtue.

In short, it clearly appears, from the

preceding detail, that a desire of pleasing is criminal when it proceeds from bad principles, and is rendered subservient to evil designs; that in those instances in which it is merely employed as a convenient instrument in accomplishing innocent purposes, it is indifferent; and that, in the instant in which it puts itself under the direction of benevolence, it passes over into the class of virtues. In the language of the text, then, only is there any moral merit in pleasing our neighbour, when we "please him for his good."

In the general intercourse of society this is done by every one who so far looks beyond himself and his own concerns as to feel a sincere pleasure in giving pleasure to others: and they who are aware how much of the comfort of life depends upon a mutual exchange of civilities and kind offices, will readily allow no inferior place in the scale of excellence to that habitual good-will which hourly shews itself in
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good-humour, kind language, and an obliging behaviour. It is the possession or the want of this disposition which makes the principal difference between happy and unhappy families. The house that is inhabited by churlish and selfish spirits, who, whilst they expect every inclination to bend to theirs, are wholly incapable of yielding in their turn, must be the seat of spleen, ill-humour, and contention. Whereas the domestic circle, all the members of which, from a sincere affection for each other, discharge with cheerfulness their respective duties, and discover in their daily intercourse a desire to serve and please each other, will not fail to experience content and happiness, as far as content and happiness is the lot of mortals. Much of the comfort of more casual associations, every one knows, must depend upon a disposition to please and to be pleased in the parties which form them. Who has not seen the pleasure of conversation interrupted, and its

useful purposes frustrated, by the conceit and impertinence of a confident talker, who without any respect for the judgment, or any tenderness for the feelings, of others, has been determined at all events to display his own talents and maintain his own assertions? In how many instances has it happened that a tenacious adherence to a man's own inclination or convenience, and a determined resolution not to make the smallest concessions in favour of the inclinations or convenience of others, has proved the occasion of incurable alienations and inveterate enmities! Whilst, on the contrary, a yielding temper, and a desire of obliging, has in many happy instances extinguished the flames of dissension at their first appearance. Of such great value is a disposition to please, when it is directed towards the general end of promoting the comfort and happiness of others.

But in order to carry this disposition to its highest point of perfection, and give it

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its full lustre as a branch of christian charity, it must be immediately directed, not only towards the general happiness of others, but in particular towards their moral improvement. The apostolic precept of the text requires not only that we "please our neighbour for his good," but that we please him "for his good to edification."

The first step towards this high attainment is, unquestionably, to refrain from such practices or indulgences as, though in our judgment innocent, would be likely to betray others into guilt. This is the particular species of charity to which St. Paul refers in the text. He had laid it down as a rule for his own conduct, not to do any thing by which his weak brother might be offended, that is, be made to fall. When, therefore, he found that some of the Jewish Christians thought it a crime to eat meat which had been offered to idols, though he himself was persuaded that "nothing is of itself unclean,"

clean," and that every kind of food was lawful, he nevertheless, for their sakes, abstained from such meats as they judged impure, lest his example should entice them to a violation of conscience; and he exhorted his fellow-christians not to put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way; on this general principle, that "they that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

The precept of the text is not intended to recommend an universal compliance with the tastes and humours of others for fear of giving them offence; for it is evident, that upon cases of mere expediency or prudence, there must be so great a diversity of judgments, that a man who should attempt to make the opinion of others the rule of his conduct, would be wholly at a loss what course to pursue; and after all his endeavours to please, at the same time that he would lose the satisfaction of following his own judgment,

ment, would inevitably offend many. In such cases, therefore, a man has nothing left but upon mature deliberation to determine and act for himself, without regard either to the censures or the applauses of others. The irresolution and feebleness of mind which an anxious desire to please others in every thing always discovers, accounts for the common maxim, that he who endeavours to please every one will in the end please no one. Neither can benevolence require, nor good sense permit, that we should ordinarily suffer our actions to be controuled by the misconceptions, the prejudices, or the humours, of others. No good purpose whatever can be answered by being very solicitous to please those who are inclined to be displeased without reason. Far from this, it will often be found that such timid compliances contribute to establish prejudices, and to encourage an uncharitable and superstitious spirit.

There is only one exception to these remarks,

remarks, and it is that which the apostle makes—that we should so far consult the opinions and feelings of others, in cases in which conscience may be supposed to be concerned, as not, by the latitude which we allow ourselves in things to us innocent, to entice others into actions which they judge to be criminal. The ground of this exception is evident, “that to him who thinketh any action to be sinful to him it is so.” We are indeed at liberty, and perhaps ought, to endeavour to lead our weaker brethren into a more just and enlarged way of thinking, that they, as well as ourselves, may be free from the encumbrance of unnecessary scruples: but, whilst their doubts remain, it is unquestionably the part of christian charity rather to deny ourselves an innocent indulgence, or submit to an unnecessary restraint, than to hazard the innocence of a weaker brother. To one who is guided by the principle of christian benevolence, many things which are lawful will

will not appear expedient; "for he seeks not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

The particular case to which the apostle refers, when he says—"If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth," is not likely at present to happen: but other similar circumstances may arise in which an occasional compliance with the prejudices or misconceptions of others may be necessary to preserve them from guilt. To refuse conformity to an innocent ceremony which another judges obligatory, where our example might lead him into a culpable neglect of what he judges to be his duty; or to advance opinions, however just, which in any particular instance would be likely to be misapplied and abused, would be a violation of christian charity.

But, besides the temporary restraints to which a desire of pleasing others for their good to edification will induce us

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to submit, there are active exertions for the intellectual and religious improvement of our brethren which may properly be comprehended in the precept of the text.

If we be desirous of rendering an essential service to our brethren, by removing their misapprehensions and prejudices upon religious subjects, and laying open to them treasures of useful knowledge with which they are at present unacquainted, we can never promise ourselves success in this difficult undertaking, unless we endeavour to conciliate their good-will by convincing them of our friendly intention, and proceed with that caution and modesty which will give them a favourable idea of our judgment. Every man has a partiality for his own opinions, and will always consider a rude and violent attack upon them as a kind of hostility against which he must put himself upon his guard. He who shocks another by the boldness of his assertions, or disgusts him
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by the violence of his temper, will seldom convince him by the force of his reasoning. Before a man can be led to embrace a truth, he must be in a disposition to examine its evidence; and before he will submit to be instructed, he must think well of his teacher.

If we wish to serve a friend by performing the difficult office of admonition, our first care must be to convince him that we undertake it from the purest motive of kindness. If from the haughty air with which the reproof is delivered, or the violent language in which it is expressed, he perceive that it is rather dictated by pride or resentment than by affection, he will be rather inclined to reject it with indignation or contempt than to lend it a willing and obedient ear. No one can bear to be reprov'd but by those whom he respects; and it is only by mild and gentle methods that the best friend can obtain a hearing in so unwelcome a cause. The unpleasant medicine of reproof

proof will then only be taken without reluctance, when it is mingled with the agreeable cordial of good-humour, and administered by the hand of one whom we love.

If parents and others, who have the charge of young persons, would not be unsuccessful in the important task of moulding their dispositions and manners according to the principles and laws of virtue, they must begin by obtaining a settled place in their affections. Mildness and kindness must always soften authority to render it effectual. Where these are happily united, and under their direction, an uniform course of gentle but firm discipline is pursued, it must either be an uncommon perverseness of disposition, or a most unfortunate concurrence of circumstances, which will be able to draw aside a young man from the easy and pleasant path of innocence, which through the years of infancy and childhood he hath been accustomed to tread. It may
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be reasonably expected, that a child who has been thus trained up in the way in which he should go, when he is old will not depart from it.

Lastly, whatever influence we hope to have over others to engage them by our example in the practice of virtue, must be in a great measure derived from an attention to the precept of the text. Virtue never appears so lovely as when she is attended by the gentle graces of good-humour and courtesy. If you wish to attract the eyes of the world, not for the selfish purpose of vain ostentation, but with the benevolent desire of being imitated as a pattern of good works, be ambitious, not only to extort admiration by the practice of the more sublime and rigid virtues, but to captivate affection by the daily exercise of the amiable qualities of modesty and humility, affability and kindness, gentleness and humanity. In this manner let every one of us please

66 *When a Desire of pleasing, &c.*

his neighbour for his good to edification,
that our light may so shine before men,
that others, seeing our works, may glorify
our Father who is in heaven,

Great Popularity no Proof of great Merit.

LUKE vi. 16.

*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well
of you!*

THIS denunciation, omitted by the evangelist Matthew, is preserved by Luke in his brief relation of our Saviour's sermon on the mount. The words, on the first reading, have a paradoxical appearance, both as they suppose, what may be thought not very likely to happen, that some individuals may be so fortunate as to obtain every one's good word, and as they seem to contradict that natural prin-

ciple of the human mind which impels us to pursue, as a desirable object, the general good-will of mankind. The former difficulty will be easily removed by remarking, that the words are to be considered as a kind of proverbial maxim which is to be explained with some degree of latitude, and not to be stretched to the full extent of its literal meaning. Though it may not be true, strictly speaking, that any one is spoken well of by *all* men, many persons obtain such a high degree of popularity as to justify the expression in a general and proverbial sense. With respect to the apparent inconsistency of the maxim with that natural principle, the love of fame, it will instantly vanish, if a just idea be formed of the use and value of this principle, in comparison with others of a higher nature, in the moral economy of the human mind. It will appear, in the sequel of this discourse, that the same considerations which evince it to be innocent, and
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even meritorious, to seek applause by certain means, and to a certain degree, prove it to be culpable to determine to obtain it by any means, and at all events.

Unquestionably there is something highly grateful to an ingenuous mind in the voice of praise. It is from the interest which we conceive others to take in our actions, and the esteem and affection with which we suppose ourselves to be regarded by those around us, that life derives one of its most powerful charms. Where is the man so totally divested of all regard to the opinion of the world as to be capable of being happy, if he were assured that all men thought and spoke ill of him? Even though such general obloquy were to fall upon a man merely through misapprehension or prejudice, without any real fault on his part, to meet it with perfect indifference would require a degree of insensibility wholly unnatural, or an elevation in wisdom and virtue more than human. So natural a

passion is the love of applause—so fond are we of admiration for its own sake, independent of the merit which may be supposed to create it, that there are few of us who do not take some pains to appear in the eyes of others wiser, richer, or in some other respect better, than we are—who do not find some gratification in being flattered for accomplishments which we do not possess, at least not in the degree which partial friends or artful sycophants may represent.

The truth, however, is, that no praise is valuable but that which is founded upon real merit. In the judgment of a wise man, the *good opinion* of others can be desirable only as far as they are competent and impartial judges of character. If, through ignorance, they place a value upon actions which have in reality no moral merit, or if, through prejudice and passion, they suppose that conduct laudable which is in fact criminal, their approbation is so far from being a just object

of ambition, that it ought to be treated with contempt. To stamp a value upon the *good word* of another still more is requisite. Before I can be assured that I ought to be pleased and gratified when any one speaks well of me, I must have so much confidence in his good-sense and fairness as to believe him both able and willing to form a true judgment of my character; and I must have such a firm persuasion of his honesty as to believe, that in paying me the tribute of applause he speaks the real sentiments of his heart. To all this must be added an inward consciousness of deserving the praise we receive. The man whose conscience tells him that he deserves to be universally despised, could derive little satisfaction from hearing all men speak well of him.

If that praise alone is valuable which is thus well-earned and honestly bestowed, it is easy to perceive, that in order to make universal praise a worthy object of desire, more wisdom in judging, and more

virtue in acting, are necessary than can be expected in the present imperfect state of human nature and human society. If, indeed, all men fixed their ambition upon those attainments which constitute intellectual and moral merit, and were desirous of obtaining applause only for actions and dispositions in themselves praiseworthy—if, on the other side, all men, dismissing every unworthy and frivolous object of admiration, were unanimously resolved to confer the meed of praise only upon characters adorned with the intrinsic excellencies of wisdom and virtue, fame would then be universally the reward of distinguished worth, and a man would need no other proof of deserving well than that he was well-spoken of. But while men continue to seek and to bestow praise under the influence of erroneous opinions and corrupt passions, it must be expected that it will be as frequently bestowed undeservedly as withheld unjustly: men may possess great merit,

merit, and yet be despised; little, and yet be applauded; and it may be laid down as a general maxim, expressive of the spirit of our Saviour's doctrine in the text—"That to obtain very general praise is no certain mark of distinguished merit, but rather a presumption of the contrary."

Farther to confirm and illustrate this doctrine, we may remark, that a very high degree of popularity *may* be attained by the basest and most criminal means; that it is *commonly* the effect of timidity, servility, and duplicity; and that it is *scarcely ever* the reward of exalted and singular merit.

In the first place, a very high degree of popularity may be attained by the basest and most criminal means. Perhaps it might not be unfair to adduce, in confirmation of this first remark, the example of those *great men*, as they are stiled, who under the imposing titles of heroes and conquerors have been the scourges

scourges and pests of mankind. For to what have the Alexanders and Cæsars of ancient or modern times owed their glory, but to that insatiable thirst of power and distinction which, to obtain its ends, has not scrupled to sacrifice the dearest rights of men, and to destroy the property, the peace, and the lives, of millions of their fellow-creatures? How strangely must the ideas of mankind have been confounded, and their judgment perverted, before they were brought to esteem rapine and murder glorious achievements, and to immortalize these illustrious plunderers in the most splendid pages of history! But, not to insist further upon this example, how many instances do the records of ancient times, and the experience of later ages, furnish of men, who, with an entire destitution of principle, and under the influence of the vilest passions, have by the help of uncommon talents found means to ingratiate themselves with the public, and accomplish their inquit-

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ous designs! Suppose a man possessed of such wonderful dexterity in adapting himself to all characters, that with men of rigid morals he can be severe; with libertines, licentious; with the young, gay; grave with the old; cautious with the timid; and with men of enterprise, daring; it is easy to see that a man capable of all this versatility, so long as he has the art to conceal from public view the inconsistency and the abandoned depravity of his character, will obtain universal admiration; and at the same time that he is corrupt and vicious in the extreme, will, to a certain degree, be well spoken of by all.

But to gain popularity by such means as these requires uncommon talents. The end is much more frequently and easily obtained by meanness, servility, and duplicity.

When a young man sets out in life with a large stock of natural good-temper, which inclines him to be easily pleased with himself
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and to take delight in pleasing others, he is ambitious of obtaining every one's good-will, and easily persuades himself that it is by no means an impracticable undertaking to please every body. Conscious of his own good intentions and dispositions, and ignorant of the humours, prejudices, and caprice, of mankind around him, he presumes that nothing further will be necessary for this purpose than a little prudent caution, a few innocent compliances, and an easy course of obliging attentions: and where an uncommon sweetness of disposition is united with an engaging address and amiable manners, and these are surrounded with the adventitious attractions of fortune and other favourable circumstances, it is possible that good-will, almost universal, may for a time at least be obtained by means perfectly innocent and laudable. But it is not commonly to be expected, that those who, at their entrance upon the world, are anxiously solicitous to obtain
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every one's good word, will be able to execute their design without some degree of meanness and criminality. They will generally find it necessary, in the first place, to make themselves masters of the convenient art of accommodation. It must be an object of unceasing attention to suit themselves, as much as possible, to the humours and opinions of those with whom they converse, and to avoid with the utmost care every occasion of offence. For this purpose silence must be strictly observed on all subjects which might awaken the irritating spirit of contradiction. Opinions the most absurd, assertions the most groundless, must pass unnoticed: slander, indecorum, profaneness, must remain uncensured. Even when virtue requires them to speak, the fear of offending will compel them to hold their peace. Where silence is impracticable, the next care must be to make use of that kind of language and address which will be most likely, not
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to serve the cause of truth or virtue, but to preserve favour and conciliate affection; and it is well if, in compassing this end, they content themselves with such compliances as lie within the limits of innocence and honesty. The transition from cautious reserve to artful management and ambiguity, and from these to downright duplicity and falsehood, is easy; and those who are very solicitous to please, will not long be very scrupulous concerning the means. If, in order to obtain the good opinion and the good word of another, it be requisite to seem to approve what in their hearts they condemn; to bend the knee to the man whom they despise; to cringe, and fawn, and flatter, where an independent spirit would dictate neglect or contempt; to humour the caprice of a fool; to soothe the passions and feed the vices of a profligate; to forward the designs and serve the interests of a knave; in a word, to become partakers of other men's sins: the terms, it is

is true, are hard, the sacrifice is great; but the prize is too valuable not to be purchased at any rate. In this manner are men frequently tempted, by the apprehension of inconvenience from the ill-will, or by the expectation of advantage from the favourable opinion, of others, to the cowardly concealment or the base desertion of their principles: thus is integrity abandoned, conscience corrupted, and heinous guilt incurred, from the vain ambition of being spoken well of by all men.

Or if, in some fortunate instances, the consequences of an excessive thirst after popularity should not be thus mischievous; if it should sometimes happen that a man should retain his innocence, and at the same time gain universal approbation and applause; thus much, however, must be asserted, that it is *scarcely ever* seen that this reward is bestowed upon a man of exalted and singular merit.

Some shining acts of heroism, patriotism,

otism, or humanity, may indeed excite universal attention and admiration, and produce a general burst of applause: but it is for the most part true, that a character distinguished by extraordinary wisdom and eminent virtues is too exalted to be popular. A man who rises above the rest of his species in the grandeur of his conceptions, and the benevolence of his designs, is too intent upon the great objects which occupy his thoughts, and too ardent in his noble pursuits, to be capable of condescending to practise the little arts of popularity. If his design be to alleviate the burdens of his fellow-creatures by executing some extensive plan of philanthropy; to promote the prosperity of the community to which he belongs by completing some scheme of public utility; to rescue mankind from the grievances and miseries of oppression by boldly asserting the *rights of man*, and supporting the cause of freedom; or, lastly, to emancipate the world from the tyranny of superstition

superstition and priestcraft, by disseminating just and liberal notions concerning religion—whatever be the particular way in which he wishes to serve mankind, he is more ambitious to deserve well of them “by actual services, or at least by glorious attempts,” than to obtain from them universal applause. Hence, in the prosecution of his designs, he makes use of no concealment, practises no artifice, consults no man’s humour or interest, “bends to no man’s prejudices;” but pursues one consistent, uniform course of integrity and public spirit. “There is*,” as an elegant writer has justly and beautifully observed, “a magnanimity in eminent worth which scorns and rejects all disguises, and would appear and be itself.” It cannot be expected that such uncomplying, unmanaging goodness, however exalted, should be every where well spoken of. It may even be

* Hurd’s Sermons, Vol. II. S. viii.

apprehended that it will sometimes run into errors and imprudencies from which inferior merit is free, and thus unnecessarily subject itself to obloquy from its enemies, and even to censure from its cautious and timid friends. As in writing, inaccuracies often fall from great genius which moderate talents would have escaped; so in life, excesses will almost unavoidably accompany that energy and ardour of mind which nourishes exalted virtue. The excellencies will, indeed, abundantly atone for the defects, and, with competent judges, will almost annihilate them: but these defects will be misapprehended by the ignorant, and magnified by the prejudiced, and mingle their cup of praise with no small portion of obloquy.

Add to this, that exalted merit soars above the comprehension of ordinary minds, and often merely for want of being understood loses its due tribute of applause. To men of a narrow and selfish spirit,

spirit, disinterested goodness, carried to an uncommon length, and displayed in a course of bold and hazardous labours, appears altogether unnatural; and they know not how to account for it without imputing it to fanaticism or insanity: or if they secretly reverence that merit which they feel themselves wholly incapable of attaining, envy, that base passion which would reduce every thing to the measure of its own littleness, is industrious in devising and circulating tales to its discredit. Thus through ignorance or misapprehension, or through jealousy and pride, in those who ought to admire and celebrate their worth, men whose talents and virtues justly entitle them to be ranked among "the excellent of the earth," not only fail of obtaining deserved praise, but are loaded with censure and calumny.

This will be more especially the case, when the efforts which are made by men of such superior worth for the benefit and

improvement of mankind are of such a nature as necessarily to interfere with the interests or oppose the prejudices of multitudes. When the schemes of reformation which they labour to accomplish, however beneficial to mankind at large, or however consonant to every principle of equity, threaten to invade the exclusive privileges, or obstruct the flattering prospects, of individuals; when the tenets which they maintain, and the doctrines which they labour to propagate, however rational and well-founded, militate against systems of opinion which have been long embraced and held sacred; a numerous host of opponents will arise, who, to bring into discredit the good work of reformation, will vilify the reformers themselves with the opprobrious names of seditious incendiaries, fanatics, enthusiasts, heretics, or infidels. Such has been the fate of all illustrious reformers from the time of our Saviour, who was eminently entitled to that appellation, to the present day:

day: and whoever, in any period, has strength of intellect sufficient to form, benevolence and public spirit sufficient to undertake, and courage and perseverance sufficient to execute, such great designs, must during the enterprise be contented with the consciousness of endeavouring to deserve the applause of mankind, and with the assurance of obtaining the approbation of that great Being who is the infallible judge and the sure rewarder of merits: for although men must look not to the generation in which he lives, but to more enlightened and impartial posterity, for the meed of universal praise.

The sum of what hath been advanced in this discourse is, that no man who aims at uncommon merit has reason to expect that all men will speak well of him; and that, if this boon be at all obtained, it must either be by the basest artifice and hypocrisy, or, at best, by a timid, mean, and in many instances dishonest, compli-

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ance with the prejudices and passions of others: whence is sufficiently evident the propriety of the proverbial denunciation of the text—"Woe unto you, when all men speak well of you!"

Relinquish, then, without hesitation, the seducing wish and expectation of obtaining every one's good word. In pursuing the phantoms, universal admiration and applause, you will inevitably lose this opportunity of acquiring distinguished merit; you will be in great danger of losing your innocence and integrity; you may possibly be seduced into the utmost depravity of character. Let your first concern, then, be to acquire those virtues which will entitle you to the esteem of all; and, having done this, be contented with that portion of praise, be it more or less, which the wise and good around you are inclined to bestow. In defiance of all the reproach and contempt which are cast upon men "of whom the world is not worthy," dare to be singularly

larly and eminently good. Employ your best talents for the benefit of your neighbourhood, of your country, and of mankind at large. Approve yourselves sincere and steady friends to virtue, to the right of private judgment, to liberty civil and religious, and to all those important interests which constitute the happiness of individuals, the prosperity of nations, and the dignity and glory of man. And if ye need any other recompence than the consciousness of feeling rightly and acting worthily, look forward to that great day when the righteous shall stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted them, and the contempt and reproach of men shall be succeeded by the plaudit of the Almighty—"Well done, good and faithful servants!"

fairly and eminently good. Employ your best talents for the benefit of your neighbourhood, of your country, and of mankind at large. Approve yourselves useful

Benevolence, preferable to Selfishness:

private judgments, civil and religious, and to all those important interests which constitute the happiness of individuals, the prosperity of nations, and the dignity and glory of man. And it is needed any other recompense than the con-

ACTS xx. 35.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

AMONG the treasures of wisdom transmitted from ancient times to the present, none are more valuable than those moral maxims which express, in a few concise and pointed terms, weighty sentiments for the regulation of human life and manners. Many such are scattered through the writings of the ancient philosophers, historians, and poets; and it would be a labour

labour of no inconsiderable utility to collect these precious fragments, and bring them into familiar use. While the common sayings of ordinary persons perish without regard, like water spilled on the ground which no one attempts to gather up, the pithy apophthegms of wise and excellent men should be carefully preserved, like the dust of gold, or the least sparks of diamonds.*

A beautiful specimen of this kind of sententious wisdom we have in the text; and it is a circumstance which may particularly recommend it to our attention, that it is a saying of our Saviour not to be found in the original records of his doctrine left us by the evangelists, but casually preserved by Luke in his history of the transactions of the apostles, as a quotation made by Paul in his farewell address to the church of Ephesus. Words of Jesus, in this manner rescued from ob-

* Tillotson.

96 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

livion, ought not to be overlooked or forgotten by his followers.

Independently of this circumstance, the maxim—"It is more blessed (or more happy) to give than to receive," expresses an important sentiment which may well deserve a distinct and attentive consideration. The observation may be understood in the limited sense in which it appears to have been quoted by the apostle, in reference to acts of charity for the relief of the necessitous; or it may admit of a more comprehensive interpretation, as expressing that "law of love" which is the fundamental principle of christianity, and to instruct us that benevolence is productive of more happiness than selfishness. Let us contemplate the doctrine of the text under each of these aspects.

In its more limited sense the text expresses a sentiment which we sometimes find in the writings of the ancient moralists; one of whom has said—"I had rather

rather not receive benefits than not bestow them* ;” and another—“ There is more pleasure in doing a kindness than in receiving one†.” And this is a sentiment which accords with the feelings of every generous mind; the foundation of which in nature and reason it will not be difficult to explain.

For this explanation I will not have recourse to so selfish a feeling as the haughty consciousness of superiority of condition which accompanies acts of liberality to the poor. In some little minds, it is probable that a very considerable portion of the pleasure attending such actions is derived from a comparison of their own situation with that of the objects of their beneficence. The air of proud condescension with which some persons bestow an alms, but too plainly indicates that they are rather contemplating with com-

* *Malum non recipere beneficia quam non dare. Sen.*

† *Ἐν τοις ἡθελῶν ἀνθρώποις καὶ καλῶν.*

Plut.

placency

92 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

placency their own good fortune in being exempted from poverty," and surrounded with affluence, than delighting themselves with the idea of the relief and comfort they are communicating to the wretched. The pride of wealth, so often ostentatiously displayed in the manner of conferring a benefit, annihilates the value of the gift by impressing the receiver with an humiliating perception of inferiority, and a painful sense of the burden of his debt of obligation. If that which Solomon says of the borrower be true, that he is "a servant of the lender," with how much greater reason may it, in the supposed case, be said, that the receiver is a servant of the giver? But these feelings, on either side, are without any just foundation in nature, and could have no existence in a state of society in which wealth was not estimated beyond its true value. No man ought to be proud of giving; nor ought any man, whose poverty is not the consequence of criminality,

Benevolence preferable to Selfishness. 99

ality, to be ashamed of receiving a benefit. It was not upon the narrow principle which gives birth to such pride, or such shame, that Jesus built the maxim—"It is happier to give than to receive;" it was upon higher and better grounds that he addressed the principle of self-love.

The maxim of the text instructs us to expect happiness as the reward of liberality: but this happiness does not consist in the proud consciousness of standing above the person whom we oblige, and looking down upon him as our inferior; but in the rational satisfaction attending the retrospect of a good action, and in the benevolent reflection that we have contributed to alleviate the distress or increase the happiness of another. The reception of a benefit is, indeed, accompanied with pleasure from the immediate perception of relief from pain, or from the acquisition of some present means of support or enjoyment; but it yields no moral feeling of self-approbation. On the other side, when

94 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

when a man confers a benefit from a pure principle of benevolence, his bosom glows with delight, and his countenance is brightened with cheerfulness, from a consciousness of disinterestedness, accompanied with a grateful feeling of moral dignity and merit. In bestowing a benefaction, the donor is conscious that he is performing an action which he himself will always recollect with pleasure, which all good men would applaud, and which God himself must approve.

Further, the increase of happiness in the person who receives a benefit, however great in the instant of receiving it, is often of short duration, and can never last beyond the immediate experience of relief or advantage. But the happy fruits of a generous action to the person who performs it, provided only that it be the sincere offering of a benevolent and virtuous mind, may remain through the whole of his present and future existence; for, besides that the pleasing remembrance
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of a good deed is a treasure which can never be lost, the charitable man has every assurance which the providence and the promise of God can afford him, that his "works of love" shall receive an abundant recompence. In this world, his liberality is rewarded, not only by the gratitude of those who experience its happy fruits, but by the esteem of all good men, and by the assurance which this affords him of protection and kindness in case of a reverse of fortune in his own condition. "He that giveth to the poor," saith Solomon, "shall not lack."—"Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth." Upon the generous and compassionate friend of all the poor shall descend "the blessing of him that was ready to perish."—"Give," saith our Saviour, "and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and

96 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

and running over, shall men give into your bosom; for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." Nor are the rewards of charity confined to the present life: the man who is "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate," (supposing his charitable deeds to be the fruit of genuine goodness) "lays up in store for himself a good foundation against the time to come," and will finally become a partaker of "eternal life."—"When thou makest a feast," saith Jesus, "call in the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed; for although these cannot recompense thee, thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Even without taking into consideration the external rewards of charity, present or future, the donor of a benefaction, if his heart be in unison with his hand, may be pronounced happier than the receiver. The pleasure which the latter enjoys

enjoys is of a selfish kind, arising wholly from the experience of some improvement in his own condition; but the former, in bestowing a benefit, carries his desire of happiness beyond himself to a fellow-creature in want or distress; and, in participating the feelings of the object of his bounty, enjoys the refined pleasure of disinterested benevolence. Besides the calm satisfaction attending the consciousness of having done his duty, he feels a glow of generous delight in contributing to another's happiness, which is in itself an ultimate good of the purest and most exalted kind.

To be convinced how much greater happiness arises, even in the immediate act, independently of all remote consequences, from bestowing than from receiving a kindness, imagine the case of an afflicted house, where a widowed mother and her infant train are struggling with the complicated misery of lost comfort, disappointed hope, oppressive sickness,

98 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

and threatening want. Conceive the widow and the fatherless visited, in this hour of distress, by some kind and generous benefactor, who knows how to soothe their sorrows by the gentle accents of condolence, and who with a judicious hand pours the balm of consolation into the wounded heart, by bestowing, with all the delicacy of a generous sympathy, a seasonable and liberal supply. While you rejoice with the objects of his bounty, say, do ye not envy the feelings of him who has caused the widow's heart to sing for joy? When you see him quitting the gloomy habitation, through which his beneficence has darted a transient gleam of joy, with a countenance sweetened with benevolence, and illumined with the consciousness of having been the minister of consolation to the wretched, can you avoid exclaiming—"How much more blessed is it to give than to receive!"

Thus well-founded is the maxim of the text, taken in its more confined sense as referring

Benevolence preferable to Selfishness. 99

referring to acts of liberality to the poor; and in this sense the words of Jesus were applied by the apostle, when, in appealing to his christian brethren at Ephesus concerning the generosity of his conduct among them, he declared, that so far from having coveted any portion of their wealth, he had not only supported himself, but also relieved others, by the labour of his hands—"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, or given you an example how, even by labouring in this manner, ye ought to assist the weak, and to remember this saying of our Lord Jesus, It is more happy to give than to receive."

But this maxim easily admits of a more extensive interpretation, as expressing the general doctrine, that benevolence is productive of more happiness than selfishness: a doctrine which it was one of the

100 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

leading objects of our Saviour's ministry to establish and enforce. In giving his disciples a new commandment that they should love one another, Jesus made a direct assault upon the long-established dominion of selfishness, and introduced it as a fundamental rule of action in social life, that men ought to live for others rather than themselves. "No man liveth to himself," was a principle universally received among his followers: every social precept of his religion is grounded upon this principle; and it is only in proportion as men go beyond themselves, by "not seeking their own profit, but the profit of many," and find their greatest delight and happiness in serving their brethren, that they are worthy of the appellation of Christians.

The stress which christianity lays upon the social virtues, and particularly the encouragement which it gives to the exercise of disinterested and universal benevolence, are among the highest proofs of
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its wisdom and excellence. The principle of benevolence is as deeply rooted in human nature as that of self-love; and it would be as absurd to leave the former as the latter out of a system of morals. Not only are we so dependent upon each other, that no man can attain happiness without the assistance of his brethren, but we are so constantly in the habit of exercising reciprocal affection, that attention to the gratification and welfare of others becomes an essential part of our own happiness. The first and greatest charm of life is society; and in society the principal part of our enjoyment arises from mutual offices and expressions of kindness. Scarcely any human being is so entirely wrapt up in himself as to find no part of his happiness in social communications. The pleasures of the festive board, and of public entertainments of every kind, arise in a great measure from joint participation. The man of science pursues knowledge, the man of taste cul-

102 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

tivates the fine arts, chiefly from the expectation of sharing with others the pleasures of intellect or imagination. It is the hope of communicating pleasure to others which gives ardour to every pursuit; and it is the satisfaction we feel in the communication of pleasure which repays every labour.

Why does the industrious father cheerfully submit, year after year, to the fatigues and encounter the cares of business, but that he may secure and increase the happiness of his children? What but the benevolent wish of transmitting a stock of happiness to the next generation carries the anxious mother through all the pains, and labours, and vexations, which nature has allotted her? And what is it that both esteem an adequate recompence for all that they have done and suffered through the best years of their lives, but the comfort of seeing their offspring happy? Again, whence is it that the public benefactors of society from
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time to time arise to deserve well of their country and of their kind? Whence is it that the active and useful citizen is sometimes found, who, without any pecuniary recompence from the community, will devote a large portion of his time to the management of public concerns, or the regulation of useful institutions? Whence is it that the disinterested patriot, at a certain expence of private property, with the sure prospect of incurring no small portion of obloquy, and, perhaps, not without the imminent hazard of bringing upon himself personal inconveniences of a still more serious kind, will firmly and resolutely prosecute plans of public reformation and improvement? Whence is it that the honest inquirer after truth, who in the pursuit of knowledge has wasted his health and spirits over the midnight lamp, will communicate the result of his researches, in opposition to what he judges to be pernicious errors and prejudices, not only without hope of reward,

104 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

but with the certain expectation of popular odium and persecution? To what motive can we impute such sacrifices of private ease to public good, but to a genuine principle of philanthropy? And when we see this principle supporting its votaries through painful labours and severe trials, what can we conclude, but that the active exercise of benevolence is a higher and more fruitful source of pleasure than the indolent gratification of selfish appetites and passions? Such exalted characters as these, at the same time that they reflect the highest honour upon human nature, and afford an experimental demonstration of the reality and importance of virtue, are a sublime confirmation of the doctrine, that "it is more happy to give than to receive."

It is only in the degree in which men make the maxim of the text the practical principle of their conduct that they rise above sordid views and mean pursuits, and become eminent blessings to society.

To the groveling herd, who are incapable of stretching their conceptions beyond the short line of their own interest, measured upon the contracted and erroneous scale of selfish ignorance—to the mercenary tribe, who think it the grossest miscalculation to estimate one man's happiness by the good he does to others, and who are of opinion that there cannot be a more self-evident axiom than that it is better to *receive* than to *give*—to such men the doctrine of the text, after all that can be said to explain and illustrate it, will remain an inexplicable paradox: and from men of this cast society has no other benefit to expect, than that a store of wealth should be accumulated by their avarice, which shall afterwards be dispersed by munificence or prodigality. Active and generous exertions are only to be expected from persons of more enlightened understandings and a more liberal spirit. It is to those only who can perceive the propriety and feel the force
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106 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

of our Saviour's saying—"It is more happy to give than to receive," that the poor must look up for a compassionate attention to their necessities, and for the equitable redress of their grievances; that the oppressed must apply for succour against the powerful arm of injustice; or that cities and states must have recourse for the faithful and assiduous discharge of public offices, or for a generous support of great and useful undertakings. Of these opposite characters, the selfish and the generous, it is easy to see which is most worthy of respect, and most likely to be respected; and, after what has now been said, it cannot admit of reasonable dispute which is most capable of enjoyment, and bids fairest for happiness.

The conclusion, then, is, that it is the wisdom of every one to seek for happiness rather in giving than in receiving; rather in benevolent exertions for the good of others, than in a selfish attention to his own private gratification and personal

sonal interest. Those who are blessed with affluence should be instructed to make the most profitable use they are able of their riches, by cheerfully distributing from their abundance for the relief of the necessitous. If there be more happiness in giving than receiving, a rigid calculation, on the part of the rich, of the extent of their obligation to be charitable, is unnecessary. Discretion must, indeed, be exercised, to confine liberality within such bounds that it may not interfere with the demands of equity; but, as far as personal happiness is concerned, there is little hazard of overstepping the limits of prudence on the side of generosity. That portion of a man's income which remains after he has provided for his own decent support according to his rank in life, and answered the reasonable expectations of his dependents, cannot be more profitably employed than in acts of public munificence or private charity. "He that hath a

bountiful

108 *Benevolence preferable to Selfishness.*

bountiful eye shall be blessed." With respect to those whose situation deprives them of the pleasure of giving alms, and those who are obliged by their necessities to receive them; they may console themselves with the reflection, that though they have no money to bestow, they are capable of rendering many kind offices to those about them, by which they may as effectually obtain the blessings and rewards of beneficence as if it were in their power to load the altar of Charity with the most costly offerings. With the Almighty, where there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. The poor widow's mite was not refused. The great object to men of every station and rank in life should be to obtain the blessedness of "the cheerful giver," by cherishing those kind affections and that generous concern for the interests of others which will continually prompt them to benevolent exertions, according

ording to their ability. A better precept for the attainment of happiness cannot, perhaps, be suggested than this—Forget yourself, and live to make others happy; live for your family, for your friends, for your city, for your country, for the world.

On Meekness.

PSALM xxxvii. 11.

*The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall
delight themselves in the abundance of
peace.*

UNIVERSALLY as mankind are agreed to acknowledge the obligation and to admire the excellence of virtue in general, when they come to consider it in detail, in its several distinct branches, they often cease to perceive its value, and to be sensible of the reasonableness and necessity—at least in their own particular case—of practising it. To be virtuous they will readily allow to be the glory and
happiness

happiness of a rational being: to obey the will of God they without hesitation confess to be the indispensable duty of every man. But unfold these general ideas by a distinct enumeration of the several duties which they comprehend—bring the subject home to their own case by reminding them, that to be virtuous is—to refrain from every kind of fraud, oppression, and cruelty—to be strictly honest and equitable in every transaction—to keep the tongue from falsehood, dissimulation, and slander—to be candid and charitable in our judgments of each other—to be ready to employ our substance, our time, our abilities, for the benefit of those who need our assistance—to be willing to overlook affronts and forgive injuries—to abstain from unlawful pleasures—to be diligent in business, contented in poverty, and patient in trouble—to subdue the passions of pride and anger, and clothe ourselves with a humble, meek, and quiet spirit—remind men that these and many other

other duties are included in obedience to the will of God, and must be performed by every one who would obtain the character, so universally admired, of a good man—and you will soon find them, with all their boasted love of virtue, hesitating and demurring upon this or that particular branch of goodness, and industriously searching out plausible excuses for sparing some favourite vice, or for omitting, or at least postponing to some more convenient season, some difficult or irksome duty. Thus what is most lovely and admirable when surveyed as a whole, ceases to appear so when contemplated in its several parts; and what wins our applause, considered in the abstract as an object of meditation, or a topic of discourse, as soon as it is brought home to real life and practice, and is to find a place in our own characters, no longer gives us delight. It is wonderful to observe with what ingenuity men apologise to themselves and to the world for not being virtuous in particular

particular instances, who nevertheless would think it the most injurious imputation upon their characters if it were insinuated that they are not in general good men. Some virtues are above their reach. Generosity and public spirit, beneficence and liberality, for example, they will readily acknowledge to be noble ornaments and high attainments, and admire the characters which are thus adorned; but they must regret that their fortune and situation deprive them of the credit and pleasure of acquiring this exalted merit. Other virtues are beneath their notice. Industry is the virtue of the vulgar, who depend upon their daily labour for their support, from which the favourites of fortune are not ambitious to derive any share of their reputation. Humility, in the opinion of those restless spirits who are continually aspiring at great things, is a dispiriting quality which, however it might accord with the indolence of the cloister, or the enthusiasm

of the closet, is ill-suited to such characters as are formed for action and enterprise. *Meekness*, too, if many of those who profess themselves in general friends to virtue were to decide upon its merit, would be pronounced a disposition suitable enough to the character of those whose profession separates them from the concerns of the busy world, and calls them to set others an example of moderation and self-denial—a turn of mind adapted to shed a pleasing softness over the female character, which receives its highest lustre from the gentle virtues—but too feeble and effeminate a quality for those whom nature and society call to act a bold and manly part in life, and to fill up stations which require vigorous exertions and a masculine spirit.

It is my purpose, in the remainder of this discourse, to rescue this virtue of meekness from the neglect and contempt with which it is often treated, by shewing that it is as useful as it is commonly

allowed to be amiable, and that it is a quality which adds grace and dignity even to the most exalted characters. For this purpose it will be necessary that we ascertain, with some degree of precision, the nature of this virtue, and observe some of its leading features as they appear in real life.

Meekness may be defined—*that placid and tranquil temper and habit of mind which is not easily disturbed by the turbulent passions of others.* It nearly resembles the quality which is called *good-nature*. They differ, however, in one essential circumstance. Whereas *good-nature* is merely a propensity arising from the original constitution and temper; *meekness* is an habit acquired and preserved by the exercise of reason. Hence the former is only considered as a blessing; the latter is always esteemed a virtue. Some persons are naturally possessed of such sweetness of disposition, that their minds are not a fit soil for the growth of the irascible pas-

sions: it would be as unnatural for such persons to resent injuries with great vehemence and rancour, as for the lamb, "which is dumb before its shearers," to rise and tear the hand that strikes it. Such a temper is undoubtedly a fruitful source of enjoyment, and a proper subject of gratitude: but it is only when this natural disposition is voluntarily cherished and cultivated from a rational conviction of its value and utility, and from a generous desire to render ourselves agreeable and useful to others, that it rises into the virtue of meekness; and it is only when this virtue is exercised from a regard to the authority and command of God, and a desire of becoming acceptable to that Good Being who is long-suffering and slow to anger, that it becomes a religious principle. Meekness may not only be grafted on good-nature, but may, by a constant course of virtuous self-command, be planted in those minds which are naturally least suited to favour its growth.

A man

A man whose natural temper is choleric and passionate may, by constant circumspection, so far subdue his propensity to anger, as, if not to become entirely free from his infirmity, yet on the whole to be justly entitled to the character, and to enjoy in a considerable degree the happiness, of the meek. And in this case the inconveniences of the natural temper will be abundantly compensated by the consciousness of being possessed of virtuous and religious principles sufficiently strong to enable us to subdue it.

Meekness must be carefully distinguished from timidity and pusillanimity. It is, perhaps, chiefly owing to the confounding these qualities that meekness falls into disrepute. A timorous spirit, which starts at every approach of danger, will of course be cautious of giving and afraid of taking offence: and this temper will produce a certain gentleness and pliability of behaviour which will often very nearly resemble the conduct of the

man who is truly meek. But, because it is wholly the effect of selfishness, it cannot in the smallest degree partake of the merit of meekness; whose essential character is, that from motives of benevolence, no less than of prudence, it "endureth all things." The genuine virtue of meekness is the offspring of that charity which "is not easily provoked."

From this general account of the nature of meekness its excellence may be in some measure perceived: but this will be still more evident, if we proceed to remark, in several particulars, the conduct which this virtue naturally produces.

If you observe the general cast of demeanor and conversation in the man in whose character meekness is a principal feature, you will find him on all occasions courteous and affable, kind and obliging. Equally desirous to avoid giving unnecessary offence to others, and disinclined to take offence himself, cheerfulness and good-

good-humour dwell upon his countenance, civility and kindness speak in his words, and easy compliances and friendly attentions grace his behaviour. A lover of peace, both for his own sake and that of his friends and neighbours, he will carefully avoid all unnecessary occasions of animosity. That he may neither kindle angry passions in the breasts of others, nor disturb the tranquillity of his own bosom, he will never interfere without good reason in the affairs of his neighbour, pry into his secrets, or listen to whispers injurious to his reputation. In a word, the man who is of a meek and quiet spirit will diligently "follow the things which make for peace."

In the several relations of civil society this temper will discover itself in a constant solicitude to "give none offence." It is not indeed necessary, in order to preserve this temper, that a man should be indifferent to public or private rights; or tamely submit to every species of injury

and oppression; but peace will, in the estimation of the meek, be a treasure of too much value to be wantonly thrown away on every trifling occasion: both in public and private affairs, those who are truly governed by this spirit will rather submit to inconsiderable inconveniences than, for the sake of removing them, hazard all the mischiefs of contention. They will rather recede from their just claims in points of small moment, than by tenacious adhering to them create and perpetuate quarrels.

In domestic life, the prevalence of the temper I am describing will render parents mild and kind to their children, according to the apostolic precept—"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath:" it will incline children to receive the instructions and commands of their parents with respectful attention, and with all due submission—to bear with the weakness and even the peevishness of age—and, in cases where it becomes ab-

solutely

solutely necessary to act contrary to their judgment, to proceed with all the deliberation, caution, and tenderness, which so delicate a situation requires. It will lead masters to refrain from an haughty and overbearing behaviour, and from all domineering and insulting language towards their servants; will preserve them from giving way, on every slight occasion, to dissatisfaction and ill-humour, and pouring forth the swelling torrent of pride and anger in harsh and bitter words; and will incline them to contribute towards the peace and comfort of their dependents by mild and condescending treatment. On the other side, it will dispose servants to submit with cheerfulness to the necessary burdens of their situation, and to endeavour, by an obliging attention to the inclinations and wishes, as well as by a faithful and diligent execution of the orders, of those whom they have voluntarily undertaken to serve, to promote their domestic enjoyment. By such mutual

tual attentions and compliances as these meekness will instruct the several members of a family to preserve the invaluable blessing of domestic peace.

Between companions and friends this amiable temper will be an effectual guard against rudeness of speech and every other provocation to resentment, and will prompt every necessary expression of true politeness more effectually than all the artificial rules of good-breeding which custom has prescribed. Even in the performance of the difficult office of admonition it will dictate that gentle and engaging address which will be most likely to render the reproof acceptable and efficacious: according to the apostolic precept—"If a brother be overtaken in a fault, restore him in the spirit of meekness."

Such are the measures which meekness dictates to prevent offences: but if, after all its endeavours for this purpose, they should arise—and it must needs be that offences

offences will come—this amiable temper will enable us to meet them with calmness and tranquillity. The man who is truly meek never appears to so much advantage as in the midst of strife and contention. Whilst the thunders of discord are roaring around him, he preserves the region of his own breast serene and undisturbed. Even when the storm falls upon his own head, when the perverse humours and hostile passions of others invade his peace and injure his rights, he still preserves that self-command which gives him the noblest triumph over his adversary. Slow to wrath, he entirely overlooks slight affronts or trifling injuries; and even when he has sustained the most grievous wrongs, ever ready to forgive, he harbours no thoughts of revenge, no desire of rendering evil for evil. He is always inclined to view the offences of others, even when committed against himself, in the most favourable light, and to attend to every circumstance which may serve
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to restrain his resentment. Meekness, like charity, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.

Who does not see in the virtue of meekness, thus unfolded in action, and shedding its benign influence over all the relations of life, something too amiable and useful to merit the contempt with which it is sometimes treated—something which cannot fail to command the love and esteem of every ingenuous mind, and which may fully justify the character given of it by the apostle Peter, who speaks of a meek and quiet spirit as in the sight of God of great price.

This virtue, since it always proceeds from a settled principle and habit of benevolence, must always partake of the merit, and be entitled to the praise, of charity. But there are cases in which meekness, springing from a noble spirit of generosity, and accompanied by fortitude, becomes a virtue of the most sublime and exalted kind. In this light the virtue of meek-

ness appears in the character of Moses, who, during the long passage of the Israelites through the wilderness, never suffered the discontent and perverseness of the people whom he conducted to abate his ardour in their service. It was because his love to his countrymen was invincible that he endured all their complaints and reproaches with such undisturbed serenity as to obtain this character, that "he was very meek above all the men that dwelt upon the face of the earth." When the people insulted him with their murmurings, saying—"Would to God we had died in Egypt, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill us with hunger;" his meek reply was—"What are we, that ye murmur against us? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord." But the most perfect example of meekness which history affords is that of our Saviour Jesus Christ. With what unruffled composure did he, on numerous occasions,

sessions, refute the calumnies and silence the reproaches of his enemies! With what mild condescension did he endure the errors and prejudices, and even the fickleness and cowardice, of his own disciples! How calmly and meekly did he meet the insults and cruelties of his persecutors! Neither the desertion of the apostles, nor the inconstancy of Peter, nor the treachery of Judas, nor the insolence of the servant who struck him on the face in the public court, nor the indignity which was put upon him by clothing him in a gorgeous robe, and putting a crown of thorns upon his head, nor all the cruel mockery with which his inhuman adversaries endeavoured to increase the anguish of crucifixion, could disturb the serenity of his mind, or call forth one angry exclamation from his lips. On the contrary, in the very midst of his tortures his meekness and benevolence dictated this sublime prayer for his enemies—"Father, forgive them, for they

they know not what they do." Is it possible to contemplate the gentleness and meekness of Christ without feeling that meekness is not only an amiable but an exalted virtue?

Of its happy influence both upon the mind in which it dwells, and upon the state of society, after what has been said, I cannot suppose that you entertain a doubt. Can it be, that the man who is possessed of this amiable spirit should be otherwise than happy? Independent of the passions and humours of others, he rises superior to the assaults of ill-nature and malice. Enjoying a perpetual spring of serenity in his own mind, he remains unmoved amidst all the commotions of the world and the vicissitudes of fortune. Whilst he is at peace with others, he is also at peace with himself, and possesses an inward calm unknown to perverse and turbulent spirits. Look into his family, and you will see the charm of his mildness diffusing tranquillity and harmony through the

the whole happy circle, and will say with admiration—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Attend him into the more public scenes of life, you will see him spreading the blessings of peace wherever he goes. Even in the midst of the most violent contentions and angry quarrels the healing influence of this divine virtue will be experienced. How often has the tranquil presence and the gentle voice of meekness, like oil thrown upon the surface of troubled waters, smoothed the billows of contention!

It will not, then, be questioned that the meek, who are themselves peaceable, and who must always be disposed to preserve or restore harmony among others, may above all other men expect to live in tranquillity, and to "delight themselves in the abundance of peace." But what peculiar right men of this temper have to expect that they shall "inherit the earth," may be questioned. Whatever
other

other advantages may be expected from meekness, experience, it may be said, instructs us that it is the active, bold, and resolute spirits, which bid open defiance to opposition, and will suffer none to insult or injure them with impunity, who are most likely to make their way in the world. Let the matter, however, be fairly and candidly examined, and it will, I doubt not, be found, that even with respect to worldly prosperity, a meek temper and modest behaviour will, in the general issue, be found more beneficial to a man than violent and overbearing impetuosity. If the meek seem less able than others to defend themselves against assaults, they will be less likely to be attacked: for who will think of disturbing and harassing an inoffensive and peaceable man, who is an enemy to none, but wishes and pursues universal concord and happiness? The general maxim of the apostle—
“Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” may

be applied with peculiar propriety to the meek. This disposition cannot fail to conciliate the good-will and affection of all upright and honest men, and may be expected to do much towards appeasing the wrath and disarming the malice of the bad. Few persons are of so malignant a disposition as to persist in oppressing and injuring those whose gentle spirit and obliging manners invite protection and kindness. While men of turbulent, fierce, and implacable tempers, whose hands are against every man, must expect that every man's hand will be against them—the meek and peaceable may, in the ordinary course of things, hope to escape injuries; and, if they cannot grow rich by violence and oppression, may enjoy their possessions and the fruits of their honest industry in quietness and security. “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

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The result of what hath been said is, that meekness is a virtue which, instead of being despised, ought to be admired and cultivated. Be it, then, our habitual endeavour to restrain our boisterous and angry passions, and to exercise that wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy, and of good fruits.

On Sensibility.

2 KINGS xxii. 19.

Thine heart was tender.

THESE words were spoken in praise of Josiah, a young king of Judah. They seem to imply that his sensibility was an amiable feature in his character, and a promising omen of his future merit: they will, therefore, naturally lead us to examine the grounds of this judgment, and inquire how far and for what reasons a tender heart is a just title to esteem, and a proper object of cultivation; and we shall find the inquiry to be not merely a matter of curiosity, but of practical use in the conduct of life.

Sensibility

Sensibility is that peculiar structure or habit of mind which disposes a man to be easily moved and affected by the objects around him, and by the events which happen to himself or others. This quality is possessed, by different persons, in very different degrees. Some there are whose organs are formed of such gross materials, and whose spirits flow with such a sluggish current, that they are incapable of any other sensations than those of animal appetite. Such men, being merely flesh and blood, live for no other purpose than to consume the fruits of the earth: they doze away a languid existence without any enjoyment superior to that of their kindred herds in the field and the stall; and, at the end of their days, provided they have had enough and to spare, lay themselves quietly down to rest. On the contrary, there are others whom nature hath framed in so delicate a mold, who are so sensible of every impression, whether of joy or grief, that scarcely a

moment of their being passes without its pleasures or its pains. To such minds, not only is every real occurrence interesting, but imagination itself creates innumerable occasions of vexation or delight. Between these extremes there are many shades of temper and character, some approaching nearer to the one and some to the other, as they have been respectively diversified by the hand of nature or of education.

That education, as well as nature, is concerned in forming this trait of character appears from fact and experience. Though some of the seeds of sensibility are sown in every mind, favourable circumstances are necessary to bring the delicate plant to maturity. Children, whose natural dispositions are in this respect nearly alike, will discover more or less of this quality, according to the connexions in which they are placed, and in proportion to the degree of culture which has been bestowed upon their understandings.

ings and their hearts: and, at mature age, it is found that some employments and professions are more favourable to sensibility than others, and that they who are daily called upon to exercise the kind affections which belong to domestic and social life, commonly discover a greater tenderness of spirit than they who give themselves up to retirement and solitude.

Sensibility being, then, not merely the gift of nature, but capable of voluntary diminution or improvement, the due regulation of the heart in this particular must be one branch of self-government; and it becomes an important question, whether we should restrain, and as much as possible suppress, our tender feelings, or whether wisdom and virtue require us to cherish and strengthen them.

If, on this head, you consult the sages of antiquity, you will find it one of the leading doctrines of the sect of the Stoics, (among whom were many of the first

names in Greece and Rome) that a wise man will raise his mind to a state of superiority to all external impressions, and will not suffer his happiness to be affected by any of the pains or pleasures which arise from the senses or imagination; that he will seek for enjoyment within himself, in that tranquillity which arises from a contempt of fortune, and from the conscious dignity of wisdom and virtue; and, consequently, that the indulgence of the tender feelings of affection, and the soft emotions of compassion, is a weakness which it is the office of philosophy to subdue.

Among the moralists of modern times you will meet with some who adopt the same unfeeling system, though somewhat lowered in its tone; who will tell you, that the passions compose the inferior part of our constitution, which may, perhaps, in the present state of things, be of some use to stimulate us to necessary exertions; but that, in proportion as we improve in
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moral merit, we shall rise superior to the impulses of appetite, passion, and sentiment, and always act upon general principles of wisdom, and a calm conviction of what is right.

But this system, both in its ancient and its modern form, whatever decorations it may have received from eloquence, or how powerfully soever it may recommend itself to our pride under the notion of exalting human nature, evidently militates against experience and common sense: for it has always been seen, in fact, that the most excellent and sublime characters have been those, who, together with strength of intellect, have possessed an ardour of spirit and glow of sentiment which have urged them on to great and generous deeds; and it must be obvious to every one who contemplates human nature as it appears in real life, that man is a being who necessarily depends for his happiness, in a great measure, upon external objects, and that individuals of the
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human species must be capable of enjoyment and exertion in proportion to the force of the impression which these make upon their feelings. What is the very essence of enjoyment but an agreeable perception of impressions made upon the senses, bodily or mental? No man is happy because he knows a fact or believes a truth, but because he is conscious of a pleasing emotion. If, therefore, happiness is the ultimate object of our pursuit, it must be the part of a wise man to cherish that sensibility which is the immediate spring of enjoyment.

By reasonings of this kind it were easy to refute the sophistry of those who, having absorbed their feelings in abstruse speculation, or benumbed them by solitude and inaction, have been desirous of depreciating enjoyments which they are no longer capable of relishing. But false philosophy is not the only enemy to the pure pleasures of the heart: they meet with still more powerful opposition from that

that tyrant, to which all the world is disposed to pay such implicit obedience, Fashion.

From an affectation of superior wisdom, or, perhaps, through envy of pleasures which their souls, debased and frustrated by criminal indulgence, could no longer enjoy, some eccentric wits have pronounced it a proof of vulgarity and low-breeding to be touched by a tale of distress, to shed a tear over real misery, or to give way to any of the natural expressions of tenderness. The fashionable crowd, who, to save themselves the fatigue of thinking, and to avoid the discredit of being singular, take up the opinions with the dress of the day, have immediately passed from the extreme of false delicacy to that of affected insensibility: and now it becomes the mode to assume an air of indifference on the most interesting occasions; every appearance of tenderness is ridiculed; those natural expressions of sensibility which give the
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first charm to beauty are concealed or disguised; and, in short, nature is banished to introduce a kind of stoicism, of which the father of the sect would have been ashamed. This folly, considered as a species of affectation, is a proper subject of ridicule; but, regarded as destructive of humanity and virtue, it merits the most serious censure.

Suffer not yourselves, my brethren, to be reasoned out of your feelings by the subtleties of pretended philosophers, nor to be laughed out of them by the dupes of whim and fashion. Follow nature and experience, and they will teach you that sensibility ought to be cherished as a source of enjoyment, as a guard of innocence, and as an incentive to humane and generous actions.

Who is the man that is best qualified to contemplate the works of nature with pleasure? It is surely he whose soul is most susceptible of the emotions of admiration and delight from the contemplation

tion of grandeur and beauty! Who is capable of enjoying in perfection the satisfactions of virtuous friendship, the endearments of domestic life, "the dear characters of husband, father, brother," but the man whose bosom glows with every generous sentiment, and is open to every impulse of kindness? Who shall experience the divine consolations of pure devotion, but he who adds to rational opinions concerning the nature and character of the Supreme Being, sublime conceptions of his greatness, a deep sense of dependence upon his providence, warm feelings of gratitude for his mercies, and a soul which humbly and devoutly resigns its powers and interests to his direction? Where shall true enjoyment reside, if not in the heart, which is the seat of tender, every generous, every divine sentiment?

What though in the present state, where good and evil are inseparably blended, the tender heart must often bleed

bleed over miseries which it wants the power to relieve? What though the distresses of sympathy are to the generous mind, in many cases, equal to those of actual suffering? Let not the man of feeling complain of his lot, or think it hard that Heaven has called him to bear his brother's burdens as well as his own; for, in the midst of the sorrows of compassion, there is a glow of virtuous self-approbation—a consciousness of feeling as we ought—which compensates for the keenest sensations of anguish. The tears which a good man sheds over a brother in distress are “precious drops,” which the afflicted object on whom they fall receives with grateful affection, which the sympathizing mourner himself would not wish to withhold, and upon which the God of compassion looks down with complacency. Who would not rather have been the tender-hearted Samaritan, who had pity on the wounded stranger that had fallen among thieves, and bound up his

his wounds, than the inhuman Levite, who came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side? If the tender heart have sorrows of its own, it hath also joys "with which strangers intermeddle not."

But sensibility is valuable, not only as a SOURCE OF ENJOYMENT, but as an AID TO VIRTUE.

We naturally regard the first appearances of this amiable temper in children as the dawning of an honest and excellent character. When an affectionate parent observes his child discovering a tender heart, not in weak fears and alarms at the approach of imaginary dangers, but by dropping an involuntary tear upon hearing a tale of sorrow, by entering with ardour into the feelings and interests of his companions and friends, by giving unprompted and unsolicited alms to the poor and afflicted, and by treating the brute creation, and even the insect tribe, with humanity—shrinking back with ter-

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ror from the thought of crushing under foot a worm—these indications of a generous spirit he beholds with inexpressible delight; from these materials his fond imagination frames the most pleasing hopes and brightest prospects. Nor let him doubt, that if he carefully preserve and cherish the fair plant which nature has produced, it will yield a rich abundance of precious fruit.

If you have ever seen a young person discharging with cheerfulness every filial duty towards an aged father—soothing his cares by the kindest and most respectful attention; alleviating his pains and infirmities by every office of love; and bearing even the fretfulness of age without a murmur—If you have ever beheld a daughter retiring, without reluctance, from scenes of pleasure and vanity into the silent chamber of sickness, to pay the last offices of affection and duty to a dying mother—watching and weeping over her pillow; preventing her wants with the kindest assiduity; cheering her fainting heart

heart with the gentle voice of love, and sustaining her languid head in the last moments of expiring nature—in scenes like these you must have learned to prize and admire genuine unaffected sensibility; you must have been convinced, that the first ingredient in forming a perfect domestic character is a tender heart.

With whatever contempt the gay and dissipated may affect to treat this quality, its value is known and confessed by all who have been so fortunate as to retire from the public walks of pleasure into the tranquil abodes of domestic happiness. What but this can preserve alive the flame of conjugal affection through all the vicissitudes of life, and amidst all the imperfections of humanity? What but this can support and cherish parental love through all a father's labours and cares, and all a mother's sorrows and anxieties? What but this can form between brothers and sisters a bond of affection which will enliven their years of childhood and

youth with a thousand pleasures, and which no change of situation or connections shall afterwards be able to dissolve? What, in fine, but the charm of sensibility, can be of power sufficient to repel the vapours of fretfulness and spleen, and, through all the cloudy days which must be expected in the course of life, to bid the hours of domestic intercourse pass pleasantly and cheerfully along?

Even in the cottage and the desert this precious gem is sometimes found, and there affords the poor and unlettered peasant delights, which many a prince and philosopher might envy. "A portion of this treasure is sometimes given," says one who knew how to touch the finest chords of the feeling heart, "to the roughest peasant who traverses the bleakest mountains; and happy is thy cottage, and happy is the sharer of it, and happy are the lambs which sport about you."

In the most interesting concerns, and trying situations of life, let me ask you,

is it not the man who possesses a tender heart in whom you would repose your confidence, or to whom you would look up for comfort? Would you wish to connect yourself in business with a man whose insensibility would allow him to pursue the strait road of selfishness without regard to the calls of honour and generosity, or with one whose feelings would prompt him to consult his neighbour's interest as well as his own? If you were desirous of finding a friend, to whom you might commit the important charge of guarding the property and the innocence, and superintending the education of your orphan children, would you not, if possible, make choice of a man whose heart would incline him to discharge the trust with tenderness and generosity? In the hour of humiliation, when misfortune has cast you down into the vale of poverty, say, would you wish for a friend, one who, through insensibility or an affectation of wisdom, should

bid you laugh at the caprices of Fortune, and despise her frowns, or one who with tender sympathy would make your case his own, and by acts of kindness, performed with that delicacy which true sensibility always dictates, assist you in supporting your burden? Whilst you are oppressed with grief for the loss of a parent, a wife, a child, or a friend, would you choose for the companion of your sorrows the man whose nature or whose system instructs him to speak of life as a jest, and of its fond attachments as childish and effeminate weaknesses, and who is capable of insulting the silent sorrows of a heart oppressed with unseasonable pleasantry; or the man who will generously partake of your grief, echo back your sighs, lend a serious ear to your lamentations, and pour into your wounded bosom the balm of tender condolence? Lastly, when disease or decay shall bring you to the verge of the grave, what is there, excepting only your own peaceful reflections and
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"good hope towards God," which will yield you such support as the presence of a friend, whose tender heart will instruct him to listen with interested attention to your "tale of symptoms," whose gentle hand will "smooth the bed of death," and whose soothing accents will "whisper peace" to your departing spirit?

If such be the value of a tender heart in all the most important offices and interesting situations of life, shall I not be pardoned, if I recommend it to you, in the pursuit of happiness, to cultivate sensibility?

For this purpose, keep your heart with all diligence to prevent the intrusion of selfishness, and the long train of sordid passions which are its constant attendants. Beware "lest your heart be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Destroy not your native feelings by indulging in riot and excess: damp not their ardour by the sordid pursuits of avarice; sacrifice them not at the shrine of ambi-

tion. Believe me, there is little room for the kind and gentle passions in a bosom that is occupied by unlawful desires. It is only whilst the heart remains uncorrupted that it is capable of tenderness.

To this negative rule for preserving your sensibility I will add, in conclusion, two positive precepts: The *first*, frequently present before your sight examples of pure and virtuous sensibility; the *second*, embrace every proper occasion of exercising your tender and generous feelings.

I would not be understood, under the former of these rules, to recommend the frequent and promiscuous reading of modern fictitious writings of the sentimental kind; for though a few productions of this sort may be no less distinguished by their good moral tendency than by their literary merit, the generality of them either teach nothing, or worse than nothing—either tend to deprave the taste, enervate the mind, and corrupt the heart,

or, at best, only engage young people in a frivolous and unprofitable employment of the most precious moments of their lives. The pages of history afford many instructive and interesting examples of humanity and generosity; and the holy scriptures abound with narrations, both fictitious and real, adapted to inspire the youthful mind with every tender and noble sentiment. Of the fictitious kind I will mention, as particularly excellent, the fable of the *Ewe-lamb*, by means of which the prophet Nathan admonished David; and the parables of the *Prodigal Son*, and the *Good Samaritan*. Of narratives founded on real fact there is nothing in all the remains of antiquity more interesting than the story of Joseph and his Brethren. But if you wish to cultivate a manly and generous sensibility, turn your eyes to that great pattern of all moral excellence, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Behold him, from the noblest principles of piety and public

spirit, tenderly mourning over the depravity of his countrymen, and lamenting with tears the approaching ruin of their city and kingdom. As he drew nigh unto the city, he wept over it, saying—“ Oh! that thou hadst known, even thou at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes!” With what kind affection did Jesus attach himself to the family of Lazarus! and how tenderly did he sympathise with Mary and Martha when they informed him of their brother’s death, and shewed him the tomb in which he was buried! “ JESUS WEPT.” At his last painful hour, when a soul less benevolent than his would have been wholly absorbed in its own sufferings, how generously did he pray for his persecutors—“ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” How affectionately did he commit his weeping mother, who was standing at the foot of the cross, to the care of his beloved disciple!

ciple! "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! then said he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"

If you wish, in this respect, to be inspired with the spirit of your divine Master, go and imitate his excellent example. Interest yourselves tenderly in the welfare of your relations, your friends, your countrymen, and all your fellow-creatures. Let your bosom be ever open to the impressions of generosity. Have a smile of complacence for every scene of enjoyment, a sigh for every brother in calamity, a tear for every friend in sorrow. "Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep." And suffer not your tenderness to exhaust itself in sighs, and tears, and lamentations: let it prompt you to deeds of liberality and mercy. Manifest the sincerity of your kind affections, by daily exercising them in your domestic relations, by

"visiting

“visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” by supporting “the feeble knees, and binding up the broken heart,” by “becoming eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, and a father to the poor;” and, finally, by “loving your enemies, and forgiving their trespasses.”—“Be ye kind one to another, **TENDER-HEARTED**, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you.”

Unexpensive

Unexpensive Methods of doing Good.

Acts iii. 6.

*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I
have give I thee.*

THAT part of mankind on whom Providence has bestowed the distinction of wealth are almost universally objects of envy to their inferiors in rank and fortune. By the selfish they are of course envied, on account of the numerous advantages which their condition affords them for personal enjoyment. The generous, too, though disinclined to the indulgence of so base a passion, feel themselves

selves almost irresistibly impelled to envy a lot which, whilst it makes ample provision for the gratification of appetite, the amusement of fancy, and the improvement of intellect, gives full scope for the exercise of the benevolent affections.

When the warm-hearted friend of man beholds objects of compassion around him whose poverty and affliction importunately solicit that charitable aid which he is incapable of bestowing; when, at the same time, he sees the needy suppliant contemptuously spurned from the door of some pampered favourite of fortune, by the haughty and unfeeling lord of the mansion, or by his no less haughty and unfeeling menial—how naturally does he exclaim, with a sigh of discontent which is too generous to be highly culpable—

“Why are the gifts of fortune thus unequally, and, as it appears to the narrow view of mortals, thus indiscriminately distributed? Wherefore is it, under the government of a gracious Providence, that

that the power and the inclination to do good are often so widely separated, while misery is left to pine in hopeless indigence, and the generous heart is denied its purest delight and best reward?"

It is with the design of counteracting this kind of dissatisfaction with the present condition of man that in this discourse I introduce to your attention the sentiment which Peter addressed to the lame man, on whom he was about to perform a miraculous cure—"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee." None of us, it is true, are in the present day furnished with the apostolic gift of healing; but every man possesses various capacities and opportunities of relieving distress and promoting happiness which are wholly unconnected with riches. Every man, whatever be his external condition, possesses, or may acquire, moral dispositions and intellectual endowments, which will enable him to contribute to the comfort and benefit of his

his domestic and friendly connexions, and to serve the community of which he is a member. Without giving gold or silver, it is in the power of any one, who does not want the inclination, in a thousand ways to do good.

If, for example, the rich man can have the satisfaction of sending a donation from his purse, or a morsel from his table, to the cottage which, by means of disease or accident, is become the gloomy abode of wretchedness; the poor man, too, though he has neither gold nor silver to bestow, may enjoy his share of the divine luxury of beneficence, by visiting his brother in his affliction, by soothing his sorrows with the unaffected language of sympathy, and by rendering him offices of humanity and kindness, which persons in a higher station might be little qualified, and possibly less disposed, to perform: and if the moral merit of both be accurately weighed, it will, perhaps, be found that the scale will preponderate in favour

favour of the latter. For what is the sacrifice which the rich man makes in parting with a small portion of his wealth, when compared with that which is made, on the same occasion, by the kind neighbour, who, merely from a motive of humanity, gives up his profitable hours of industry, deprives himself of his natural rest, and perhaps even exposes himself to the hazard of fatal infection, to become a useful attendant in a sick room?

No one, who has known what a sick room means, can doubt, that to perform its duties with assiduity, discretion, and tenderness, is in the highest degree meritorious. A mother, watching day after day, and night after night, with unceasing attention and unabating solicitude, over a beloved child, whom some cruel disease has suspended by an invisible thread over the grave—a daughter, retired from all the gay allurements of life to the silent solitude of the chamber,
where

where a parent, long loved and revered, is gradually sinking under the infirmities of age, there to "watch and weep beside the bed of death," and to discharge the last debt of filial gratitude by every soothing word and look, and every gentle office which true affection at such a moment will dictate—a *friend*, frequently repairing to the bed-side of his sick friend, to enliven the heavy hours of languor or pain by the soothing smile of affection, and to beguile the tedious moments by cheering conversation—a *domestic*, whose grateful and affectionate heart rises above the sordid idea of gain, and prompts him to attend his master, without regarding fatigue or danger, through scenes of imminent peril or tedious affliction, to the last moments of his life—these are characters which, though in the walks of retired and humble life they may frequently pass unnoticed, are, in truth, possessed of more substantial merit, and entitled to higher praise, than belong to many

many whose posthumous munificence in providing for the erection of hospitals or churches has loaded their dust with monumental honours.

Between friends, whose hearts are united by the sacred tie of disinterested affection, wealth may, it is true, furnish many opportunities of rendering essential service. Under heavy losses or misfortunes it may supply a kind and liberal benefaction: in the moment of embarrassment it may afford the seasonable assistance of a generous loan; against violence and oppression it may provide armour of defence; for wrongs and injuries it may procure legal redress. But, without the help of money, there are numerous benefits, at least of equal value with those which are to be purchased with gold, which may be conferred by one friend upon another. In a moment of doubt and perplexity, when of two plans, having each its peculiar advantages, it is difficult to determine which

is most eligible; when of two methods of acting, each of which is attended with inconvenience and hazard, one must be adopted; or when new situations and connexions create a new set of duties hitherto unpractised, or present a new series of temptations for which the young adventurer is unprepared—of what inestimable value is that wisdom which weighs with deliberation and distinguishes with accuracy, and that experience which furnishes similar precedents, and from past facts infers the probable expectation with respect to the future! Young persons may not always be fully sensible of the value of wise counsel; but, after a few unsuccessful trials of their own strength, and a few painful mortifications and disappointments in consequence of erroneous judgments and precipitate determinations, they will learn that the maxims of wisdom are worth listening to, and that the lessons taught by experience are not to be despised.

Of still greater value, though, perhaps, even more frequently slighted, is the benefit of *faithful reproof*. The first deviations from the right way are often made imperceptibly, especially by young persons, whose attention is more agreeably occupied than in pondering the path of their feet: yet first deviations, however trifling in themselves, often terminate in the most destructive irregularities. How desirable, then, is it to have always at hand a judicious and faithful monitor, who, without exercising unreasonable severity, will bring our actions and character to the standard of virtue; and, wherever he discovers a defect, will honestly point it out—who, esteeming “open rebuke better than secret love,” and choosing rather to risk his interest in the affection of his friend than to leave his innocence exposed to hazard, will, on the first appearance of moral disease, administer the wholesome medicine of admonition! Reproof is a precious gift

which none but a fool will despise. "Rebuke a wise man," saith Solomon, "and he will love thee. As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reproöf upon an obedient ear."

Among the unexpensive methods of serving and obliging a friend may also be reckoned the payment of his due tribute of praise, and the vindication of his character from slander. A few words, which are easily spoken and cost nothing, may in either of these ways contribute an essential benefit. With respect to the former, the bestowing of praise, some degree of caution and delicacy is indeed necessary. Flattery, which is a studied attempt to foster self-conceit, is an injury instead of a kindness; and Solomon's observation is certainly just, that "he who rebuketh a man shall afterwards find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue." Even deserved praise, profusely bestowed, either defeats its own end by exciting disgust, or injures its object

object by encouraging vanity. Administered, however, with a judicious and sparing hand, praise may not only be an innocent gratification of the natural desire of reputation, but a beneficial stimulant to meritorious exertions. When it is indirectly bestowed in extolling the merit of persons who are absent, the tribute of praise is less liable to abuse; and it then, perhaps, more effectually answers the purpose of establishing the reputation of the person commended; as the applause is less exposed to the suspicion of flattery. But, after all, the most essential service which can be rendered to another man's character is to take pains to clear it from the aspersions of calumny. In the present state of society, which furnishes so many occasions and enticements to slander, the calls for the exercise of this species of benevolence are frequent; and when it is considered that this kind office may be performed at the easy expence of a little breath, it reflects no small dis-

credit upon mankind that they so often suffer an innocent reputation to lie bleeding under the shafts of malice without opening their lips in its defence. In some cases this may be the effect of pitiful timidity and cowardice; in others, it must be imputed to the still worse motive of secret malevolence. In every instance, such silence, when merit is undeservedly depreciated and innocence cruelly aspersed, and might by a spirited vindication be rescued from infamy, is a base desertion of the cause of virtue, and a criminal violation of the christian law of doing as we would be done unto. A truly benevolent man will rejoice in an opportunity of putting to silence the malignant tongue of slander; and it is a pleasing reflection, that so important an office of kindness is not confined to the rich; but may be performed by any one who has a heart to feel for the injured, and a tongue to speak in their defence.

Let us next turn our attention to domestic

most life, to remark how many of its duties and its comforts are independent of wealth. We every where see heads of families toiling, with unwearied industry, to procure for themselves and their dependents necessities, conveniences, superfluities. The higher they are able to ascend in this progress, the more are they disposed to congratulate each other on their good fortune. They conclude, and, it is owned, not without reason, that by increasing their wealth they increase their means of enjoyment: they resolve, and the resolution is, in the main, not to be condemned, that they will exert their utmost endeavours to acquire riches. But, in directing their attention to this object, men are too apt to lose sight of every other: they are ready to imagine, that when they have compassed this great end they have discharged every obligation to their families. They forget, that to be rich is not, necessarily and of course, to be happy. The serious

truth is, that when men have supplied their families with the greatest abundance of wealth, if they have done nothing else for them, they have left them, with respect to the most essential ingredients of felicity, forlorn and destitute. The master of a family, in order to render his house during his life the mansion of happiness, must not only fill it with splendid furniture; adorn it with the elegant productions of art, and supply it with the varieties of a luxurious table, but must also make innocence, peace, and love, his constant guests. In order to secure the happiness of his children after his death, he must do more for them than merely provide them with the means of living in ease and splendour; he must give them those good principles and virtuous habits which will secure them against the fascinations of folly and the seduction of vice; he must give them, by a course of steady culture and discipline, the capacity of intellectual and moral enjoyment; he must
give

give them, by the mild but commanding influence of example, a love of order, a habit of industry, a power of self-control, and, above all, a disposition to find his own highest happiness in making others happy. And all this the poor man can do for his family as well as the rich. If he is only able, with his utmost industry, to bring home to his humble cottage its "daily bread," he can bring it home with an honest heart and a smile of content; and, thus accompanied, he can bestow upon his wife and his children sincere delight, to which the gay inhabitants of many a magnificent mansion are strangers. If, when he dies, he can bequeath his children no rich legacies, he can, however, leave them possessed of healthful constitutions, uncorrupted minds, an unspotted reputation, and a good hope towards God: and, seeing his children thus endowed, he may peacefully bid them farewell, saying to them with his departing breath—"Silver and gold have I none;

I none; but such as I have give I you. Behold, I die; but God shall be with you!"

In the casual intercourses of society, or in the pursuit of its great public interests, what is it which renders a man most acceptable or most useful, the possession of extensive property, or of intellectual and moral merit? Do you estimate a man's qualifications for being an agreeable companion by the wealth he displays, or by the dispositions and talents he discovers? Notwithstanding the blind homage which is on many occasions paid to money, can it be questioned, that in any liberal society the man who has good sense, an enlightened understanding, and amiable manners, though destitute of riches, will command more attention and respect than the ignorant churl, whose only recommendation is that his coffers are full of silver and gold? Towards whom would society look up for the direction of its affairs, for the correction of its disorders,

or for the melioration of its condition—to men of wealth without information, ability, or integrity, or to men who are more distinguished by talents and virtue than by affluence? So far is it from being true that men are of value to the public in proportion to their riches, that those very men who, whilst they have been impelled by the motive of necessity have been active and useful members of society, as soon as they have accomplished their lucrative designs, have often been seen to throw themselves upon the couch of luxury, and waste the remainder of their days in useless and inglorious indolence. The greatest benefactors of mankind have been among those in whom an earnest desire of honest fame, a noble love of truth, or a generous ambition to be extensively useful to mankind, has subdued the sordid thirst of gain, and has prompted them, at the hazard of every selfish interest, to employ all the energy of their powers for the diffusion of knowledge and
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the extension of freedom. Even in the lowest class of society among the labouring poor, ingenuity and industry have often produced useful inventions and improvements in the arts of more value to the public than all the costly offerings of ostentatious munificence. The truth is, every citizen, whatever be his rank or station, is capable of serving the community; and his capacity of usefulness is not to be measured by his riches, but by his intellectual accomplishments and moral attainments. Whilst the poor man is conscious that he is benefiting the public by his manual labour, his well-directed ingenuity, his domestic virtues, and the general influence of a good example, he has no reason to be ashamed of his poverty: in the midst of his fellow-citizens he may bear the firm and erect aspect of honest pride, and may say to his country—"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee."

Without entering into further details,
the

the instances which have in this discourse been adduced of **UNEXPENSIVE METHODS OF DOING GOOD** are abundantly sufficient to prove, that the pleasures of beneficence are by no means confined to the rich, and that a man may render his brethren many important services without giving them money.

The subject of this discourse suggests an important lesson to the poor and to the rich. The poor may draw from what has been said the consoling reflection, that whatever other disadvantages they may labour under, they are not excluded from the divine delight of doing good. If they cannot enjoy the satisfaction of seeing their names enrolled in the honourable list of benefactors to public charities; if they are obliged frequently to suffer the painful mortification of seeing a fellow-creature in want without having the power to relieve him; they have, nevertheless, many ways in which they can indulge the propensities of a benevolent heart,

heart. By visiting, comforting, and serving the sick; by giving a friend useful counsel and faithful reproof; by encouraging modest merit, and vindicating injured innocence; by being an affectionate husband and a kind father; in a word, by performing all the duties of his humble station faithfully and diligently, the poor man may secure to himself all the honour and all the comfort of goodness in this world: and, having been "rich in good works" on earth, he will not fail to lay up for himself a treasure in heaven; for Jesus, the friend of the poor, hath said—"He that giveth a cup of cold water shall in no wise lose his reward." The impression which this discourse ought to make upon the rich is—not to induce them to overlook the obligations which they are under to a generous and charitable use of their wealth, by no means—but to lead them to extend their ideas of beneficence far beyond the mere distribution of pecuniary bounty; and to remind

remind them, that even though they were
“ to give all their goods to feed the poor,”
much would yet remain to be done before
they had completely fulfilled the law of
christian charity. The poor and afflicted,
your families, your friends, your neigh-
bourhood, your country, have many
claims upon *you*, whom Providence has
placed in the higher ranks of life, which
gold and silver cannot discharge. Weigh
well, I intreat you, the importance of
your station and the extent of your duty;
and never forget, that “ to whom much
is given, of him much will be required.”

When our illustrious countryman, the
immortal Newton, was asked, “ By
what means he was enabled to make those
rapid and successful advances in science
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answered, that he had, in any respect,
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to a habit which he had early acquired

Animated

**Animated Exertions in all laud-
able Undertakings recom-
mended.**

2 CHRONICLES xxxi. 21.

*In every work that he began, he did it
with all his heart, and prospered.*

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of

of close attention and patient thinking. This reply was, doubtless, in some measure, the effect of that modesty which always accompanies extraordinary merit: but, at the same time, it certainly proceeded from an experimental conviction of the advantage which is gained, in any pursuit, by a diligent application and animated exertion of the mental faculties. This great man, though unquestionably indebted to nature for uncommon talents, would never have made those wonderful discoveries and improvements in philosophy which have immortalized his name, had he not given his whole mind and heart to the pursuit of knowledge.

In undertakings of a very different nature from those of the philosopher, and in a situation which required a different kind of exertion, the person spoken of in the text experienced the benefit of this habit of interested attention. When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah, he found many disorders and abuses to

correct, and had much to reform, particularly with respect to religion. During the reign of the wicked Ahab, idolatries, and those of the most shocking kind, had been encouraged. To put an effectual stop to these impieties, and restore the pure worship of the God of Israel, was a task which required wisdom, integrity, and firmness. A torrent of opposition from those who were interested in the prevailing corruptions was to be withstood. The passions and prejudices of that part of the populace which had favoured them were to be subdued. New regulations were to be prudently introduced, and firmly supported. All this Hezekiah executed with success, because his heart was interested in the undertaking. Hezekiah throughout all Judah wrought that which was good, and right, and truth; before the Lord his God; and in every work that he began, in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his

God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered."

Of the value and efficacy of that disposition and habit of mind, of which Hezekiah has left an example worthy of imitation, experience affords innumerable proofs.

In the ordinary affairs of life, who does not see that success very much depends upon the degree of attention and spirit with which they are prosecuted? Let one man, who has made choice of an occupation in life suitable to his abilities and inclinations, and devotes himself with unwearied assiduity to its labours; and another, who has engaged in his profession reluctantly, and rather submits to its offices as a necessary burden than discharges them with pleasure from the hope of distinction, be in all other respects situated alike; there can be no doubt which of these two men will have the fairest prospect of success. The most industrious and spirited attention to business

cannot, indeed, in the present state of society, infallibly secure prosperity; but the probabilities are always greatly in its favour. In the pursuit of knowledge of every kind, and in the acquisition of all useful and ornamental arts, it is evident that almost every thing depends upon diligent application and a habit of patient attention. No man ever became a scholar or a philosopher without giving up his mind to his studies, and prosecuting them with ardour. No man ever distinguished himself as a poet or artist who did not feel a considerable degree of enthusiasm in his favourite pursuit, and apply himself to it with a determination to excel. Even in the secondary accomplishments of exterior air and address, excellence cannot be attained without attention. In short, if I were to lay down any one general rule for acquiring distinction and eminence in any profession or pursuit, it should be this—"Be interested in whatever you undertake;" or, in the language of

of the text—"In every work that you begin, do it with all your heart."

There is no circumstance in which civilised life has a greater advantage over a savage state than in the superior degree of vigour and activity which it gives to every intellectual faculty. Excepting only when the strong impulses of appetite or passion rouse him to action, the savage remains in torpid indolence, and finds his highest luxury in a total suspension of his active powers. Having been inured to no intellectual exertions, he looks at the objects around him, not with the animated expression of admiration and delight, or with the inquisitive eye of curiosity, but with the vacant gaze of ignorance. Even objects perfectly new and strange can scarcely for a moment attract his attention. It is said, that when the most southern coast of America was first visited by Europeans, the natives, though they had never before seen a ship, expressed no surprise. Civilisation calls

forth the dormant powers of the soul. Every advance which is made in knowledge presents before the mind new objects of contemplation, and affords new employment for its faculties. Hence it has been very justly said concerning those nations in which science and arts have of late made so rapid a progress, that they are *awakened*. From this *awakened state* great things are to be expected, in remedy of the numerous evils, natural, civil, and religious, which the long lethargy of former ages introduced, and for the farther improvement of human life: and every individual in this situation should keep his own faculties *awake*, that he may himself enjoy the benefit of the light which is pouring upon him from every quarter, and that he may contribute his part, both by free inquiry and active exertions, towards the daily increasing stock of knowledge and happiness.

But it is not merely in the ordinary affairs of life, and in the pursuit of know-
ledge,

ledge, that a habit of attention and activity is useful: it is also of great advantage in the transaction of all moral and religious concerns; and it is on this account that the subject before us chiefly merits your attention.

-What is it which renders one man so much more useful than another in the relations and offices of social life? Is it not, in a great measure, the superior degree of spirit and ardour with which he prosecutes the interests of society? A man may have much honesty and integrity, and great abilities, and yet, through an indolent temper which impedes him from taking an interested and active part in public concerns, he may be of very little use either to his neighbours or his country. Where shall the community look for men who will conduct its great affairs with wisdom, firmness, and efficiency? Must we look for men willing to sacrifice private ease and interest to the public spirit? Or from whom

are we to expect the reformation of opinions, customs, and manners, if not from men who, with honest principles and enlarged views, unite a warm heart and an active spirit? Is it not among this class of men alone that we must look for that attention and exertion which are necessary in executing or superintending public designs, or in the legal administration of justice? If every neighbourhood did not afford a few valuable men, who interest themselves in public affairs, and give their hearts to the good work of serving their fellow-citizens, what would become of all our public institutions which are provided for the relief of misery, the support of infirmity, or the encouragement of industry, or are in other ways adapted to the convenience and benefit of the district where they are established? or how could the wisest and most salutary laws be administered, or the most useful designs be carried into execution? It is to that active spirit which

“ seeks not its own profit, but the profit of many,” that the poor are indebted for much of the relief which is afforded them under their burdens, and that the public owes much of its security and prosperity.

The more confined relations of society may also derive many benefits from this spirit. Active exertions for mutual convenience and profit are the support of commercial connexions. Mutual attention is the life of conversation, and the very essence of civility. The reciprocal exchange of kind affections, that sympathy of hearts which prompts each party to forget himself in warm wishes and spirited efforts for the benefit of the other, is the soul of friendship. Families are happy in exact proportion to the degree of affection which subsists between the several members, and the ardour with which each pursues the peace and prosperity of the whole.

In fine, the temper which it is the design

sign of this discourse to recommend is the animating principle in every virtue, and, like the sun, diffuses life, vigour, and cheerfulness, wherever its energy is experienced.

If the influence of an active spirit be thus powerful in morals, it may reasonably be presumed that it will not be less so in religion.

Religion being a concern of the first moment, the great object of religious contemplation, worship, and obedience, being the Eternal Deity, who comprehends in his nature every quality which can impress the heart of man, it is natural to suppose that the mind which interests itself strongly in other concerns will not be able to transact those of religion with indifference. Where there is a firm belief of the existence and providence of Almighty God, accompanied with such just conceptions of his nature as may be derived from the contemplation of his works, it may be expected that there will

will be sentiments of reverence corresponding to their faith and to these conceptions: and as there are few persons who have not had these sentiments stamped upon their minds by private education and public instruction, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that there is among mankind a general bias towards religion. Consequently, it might in theory be concluded, that whatever degree of attention or ardour any individual is disposed, by natural inclination or habit, to discover in other concerns, he will commonly show the same in those of religion. Does the fact agree with this reasoning? Do men in general—I speak of those who profess to be religious by frequenting the public worship of God—take as much interest in the affairs of religion as they do in other matters which are, at least, not of superior importance? Do they think and speak concerning the first Being in the universe even with as much real heartfelt respect, gratitude, and affection,

as they think and speak of an earthly friend or patron? When they profess immediately to address themselves to him, are they as attentive to him, and as solicitous to treat him with all becoming reverence as they would be if they were called upon to pay homage to an earthly prince? Are they as much in earnest in wishing for seasons of religious worship, which afford opportunities for the exercise of pious sentiments, as they are in desiring the return of seasons devoted to social pleasures? In fine, during the hours of religious duties, are they as constantly attentive, and as truly interested, as when they are engaged in the ordinary business or amusements of life? It must be left with every individual to answer these questions to his own conscience. I shall only say, that if the conscience of any individual answers them in the negative, he may without hesitation conclude that his religion, if it be sincere, has not that firm hold upon his mind,

mind, or that deep root in his heart, which it ought to have. Considering the abstract nature of religious truths, and the superior strength of those impressions which are made upon the imagination and the heart through the medium of the senses, above those which are produced by means of the understanding alone; considering, too, the natural effect of the frequent recurrence of the same external forms of religion to damp the ardour of emotion; it may, perhaps, be questioned, whether any violent agitation of the passions in religious duties is ordinarily to be expected: and if the numerous inconveniences and improprieties which fanaticism has occasioned be recollected, it may also be questioned, whether that kind of devotion which consists in, or produces, such agitation, ought commonly to be encouraged. But devotion, if it means any thing, unquestionably means the expression of certain sentiments towards the Supreme Being.

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If these sentiments do not in some manner accompany our prayers, they are mere words, which signify nothing. Unless we are attentive to the forms of devotion so far as to understand their meaning, and make use of them as our own address to Heaven, we cannot, with any propriety of language, be said to pray. This is the least that can be implied in worshipping our Maker in spirit and in truth. Without this it can never be said of us, as it was of Hezekiah, that whatever he did in the service of the house of God, he did it with all his heart.

But, besides this, if the active spirit which I am recommending operates upon our religious character, it will extend its influence beyond the forms of religion, and will render us, through the whole course of our lives, solicitous for the preservation and spread of true religion in the world, and industrious in employing both our influence and example for its support. We shall be ever ready to defend its cause

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by the only weapon which it requires, found argument and rational evidence; and to maintain its credit, by the best apology which can be made in its behalf, a good life. Loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, we shall serve him with a willing mind.

Thus powerful is the influence of diligent attention and an active spirit in all the concerns of life. Its natural fruit is success. In all worldly affairs this effect is as probable as the precarious condition of our present being will admit. In religion and morals the effect is certain. No man ever applied himself with his whole heart to the practice of his duty and was unsuccessful. Truly to resolve is in this case to perform; for the resolution implies a virtuous disposition. What ever difficulties may attend the execution, they are only such as a steady determination and vigorous exertions may overcome: for the first step from a vicious to a virtuous course of life, that of heartily resolving

resolving to amend, requires more resolution than any subsequent act of obedience to the laws of virtue. The pursuits of religion and virtue have one advantage above all other pursuits; which is, that, under the blessing of Heaven, our success in these pursuits depends wholly upon ourselves. We must ask leave of the world whether we shall be rich and great; but we have only to ask leave of our Maker and our own hearts to be good. Many circumstances, which lie beyond our sphere of controul, may arise to frustrate our most judicious and active exertions in pursuit of worldly prosperity; but we can be in no situation in which we may not be pious and benevolent. Every sincere aspiration of the heart towards Heaven will strengthen the principle of piety: every kind action, every generous wish, every sympathetic feeling, will confirm the habit of benevolence. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the

the law of God; for whatsoever he doth in obedience to that law must prosper.

Enough has, I trust, been said to shew the use and value of active and vigorous exertions in all laudable undertakings, and to recommend to your diligent imitation the character of Hezekiah, who "in every good work that he began, did it with all his heart, and prospered."

The only difficulty that can arise upon this subject is, that a disposition and capacity for spirited exertions may be thought to depend more upon natural temper than upon voluntary resolution. There is certainly a real difference, in this respect, in the original constitution of different men. Some persons seem to be formed of much more gross and sluggish materials, or to be endowed with a less portion of natural activity, than others: but the propensity to indolence and indifference which arises from this phlegmatic cast of constitution, as it is often greatly increased by indulgence, so it may be

Fig 4. Animated Exertions in all laudable

counteracted, and in some measure subdued, by opposition. Few persons are so unfortunate in the frame of their bodies, or so defective in their mental faculties, as not to be capable of employing them to some useful purpose in life, and of improving their powers and extending their usefulness. The generality are allowed by nature a considerable field of action; and this field may commonly be enlarged by education. By those who have had the benefit of early instruction, and are furnished with the means of farther improvement, much may be done to awaken their faculties, and excite them to animated attention and vigorous exertions. Take pains to acquire just notions of the nature and condition of man as a rational, social, and immortal being, surrounded with important obligations, and capable of continual improvement: accustom yourselves to consider human life as a valuable treasure, which, if wisely improved, may become the basis of a noble superstructure

superstructure of honour and felicity: consider yourselves as connected with every human being by the ties of nature, and as interested in every thing which happens around them: in fine, frequently raise your views to the Supreme Ruler of the universe, and recollect that you are constantly acting under his inspection, and that his approbation or disapprobation, with all its important consequences both in this life and the next, is necessarily connected with the manner in which you conduct yourselves at present. Let these great and weighty conceptions constantly dwell upon your minds, and it will be impossible that you should not feel yourselves strongly impelled to the most assiduous cultivation and exercise of your powers. All the great characters which have ever graced the history of mankind have sprung from exalted ideas and generous sentiments. It was because Hezekiah feared his God, and loved his country, that he executed with his whole

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heart noble designs for the honour of religion and the benefit of the Jewish nation. It was because Jesus esteemed it his treat to do the will of him that sent him, and loved those whom his Father had given him, that "he went about doing good."

I must not take my leave of this subject without recommending it to the particular attention of the younger part of my audience.

At your entrance, my young friends, upon the important journey of human life, next to the wretchedness and infamy of choosing a wrong path, I wish to guard you against the weakness and folly of creeping on indolently and drowsily in the right one. Believe me, when I assure you that life is not a trifling game, which you may safely play as you please, but an important and serious business, which requires all your attention and all your exertions. Upon the manner in which you conduct this great concern depends

depends the whole happiness of your own existence; not for the few years in which you may be able to command the amusements and pleasures of youth, but through all the scenes of manhood and old age in this world, and through the infinitely more important scenes of an endless duration in the world to come. Upon your present conduct depends much of the comfort of those who, from the purest motives of affection, are immediately interested in your prosperity, and whose peace you are under every possible obligation to consult. On the habits you now form, depends the happiness of those with whom you may hereafter be connected in the most interesting domestic relations, and in some measure that of your neighbourhood and your country, and even of distant posterity. By the diligent cultivation of your intellectual faculties in your early years you may lay up stores of knowledge; and form habits of in-

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198 *Animated Exertions in all laudable*

quity, which may prove an endless fund of entertainment to yourselves and your connexions. By early inuring yourselves to habits of public spirit, generosity, civility, and kindness, you may qualify yourselves for becoming blessings to your families and your friends, and for rendering the most valuable services to your fellow-citizens, in future life. By cherishing the sentiments of piety in acts of devotion, you may now establish a religious principle in your minds which will be your most effectual guard against future temptations, and may lay up a fund of consolation, on which you may freely draw in those future scenes of affliction and calamity which you must not hope to escape. Amidst such important calls for attention and exertion, sink not down, I beseech you, into listless indolence; content not yourselves with that state of drowsy inactivity which scarcely deserves the name of existence; awaken your attention to all that is in-

teresting in your situation ; set in motion every spring of action within you ; let ambition, affection, gratitude, hope, and fear, all conspire to give firmness to your resolutions and vigour to your exertions. Stretch every nerve in the race of human life ; for remember, the prize is happiness.

In every good work which you begin, do it with all your heart, and you will prosper.

THE PRECEPT—“Know thyself,” was said by the ancients to have been sent down from heaven ; and the high estimation in which they held this precept was a proof that they were no inconsiderable proficient in moral wisdom : for certainly the knowledge of our own real character is the first step towards reformation. Whilst a man is intemperate of his faults, there is little probability that he will correct them. Nor is it to be

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Nathan's Reproof of David,

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be expected that any admonitions, however well-grounded or well-intended, will be effectual in reforming one who has no apprehension that he stands in need of amendment. There cannot be a more difficult or irksome task than that of re-proving an offender who has no sense of his crime.

Such appears to have been the state of David's mind at the time when the prophet Nathan was appointed to admonish him for his heinous and complicated guilt respecting Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. Although he had, by a base exertion of his power, invaded the house of a brave soldier while he was employed in his service in the field of battle, and robbed him of his dearest treasure; although, to complete the injury, he had afterwards sent an order, by the hands of Uriah himself, that he should be placed "in the fore-front of the hottest battle, that he might be smitten and die;" such was the fascinating power of his criminal pas-

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sion for Bethsheba, that he remained for a long time insensible of his heinous guilt.

It was during this period of insensibility that Nathan was commissioned to address his prince, in order to bring home to his conscience the heavy charge of adultery and murder. A more difficult task could not have been assigned him. If he hoped for success, he must neither, on the one hand, satisfy himself with such distant hints and gentle insinuations as might probably leave the offender unconvinced of his crime; nor, on the other, address him in such terms of immediate accusation and reproach as would be more likely to kindle resentment than awaken remorse. In this situation, the best expedient which could have been devised was that which he made use of, which was, to represent the case under a fictitious narrative of an act of injustice and cruelty done by another, similar in its principal circumstances to the conduct of David,

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yet so far different from his case as not to prevent him from giving the story a patient hearing. The parable was this:

There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him and his children; it did eat of his own meat and drink of his cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

Nothing could have been more judicious or pertinent to the occasion than this fable. It was a tale addressed to the heart, and told in language so simple, and with circumstances so truly affecting, that

in the bosom of David, who appears on all occasions to have been possessed of warm sensibility, it could scarcely fail of exciting strong feelings of compassion for the injured party, and of indignation against the offender. It was an exact and lively representation of the crime for which the prophet was to admonish his prince. In taking Bathsheba from Uriah David had been the rich man who had robbed his poor neighbour of his favourite ewe-lamb. The injury had been attended with many aggravating circumstances. It had been done to a man who was at the very time hazarding his life in his service at the siege of Rabbah. It had been committed by one whose exalted station afforded him ample scope for enjoyment, without invading the rights of his inferiors; by one who, on other occasions, had proved himself no stranger to the sentiments of humanity, friendship, and generosity; by one whose piety (so sublimely expressed in his sacred odes) might have

have been expected to have been an effectual restraint from every thing criminal; by one whose rank and character, as king of Israel, ought to have given him an elevation of spirit which would have rendered him incapable of baseness and cruelty: and, lastly, that authority with which princes are entrusted for the protection of innocence, and for the punishment of evil-doers, David had employed in making provision for the indulgence of a criminal passion, and in executing the horrid purpose of depriving an innocent and an injured man of life.

Under this accumulated load of guilt, one would have supposed that David's conscience would have been perpetually reproaching him; or, at least, that it would have been ready to take alarm on the slightest occasion, and particularly that it would have applied the prophet's fable to his own case, and made it wholly unnecessary for him to add—"Thou art the man." We find, however, that he heard
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the tale without discovering the least apprehension that it was applicable to himself. He was, indeed, moved with indignation against the supposed offender. The unmerciful oppressor of whom Nathan spoke he instantly condemned, and determined to punish. Nay, so vehemently was he exasperated against him, that he resolved to treat him with a degree of rigour which neither equity nor the law would justify. "As the Lord liveth," saith he, "the man that hath done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he hath done this thing, and because he had no pity." He thought that no punishment could be too severe for a man so void of compassion as to be able, without provocation, and almost without advantage, thus to sport with the happiness of his neighbour. He did not, all this while, perceive that the indignation which he expressed against the rich man who had so wantonly robbed his poor neighbour of his lamb, might
much

much more justly fall upon himself for the injustice and cruelty with which he had treated Uriah: he was not aware, that the sentence he passed upon the supposed offender ought to have been pronounced upon himself.

This circumstance may teach us, that it is possible for men to be chargeable with heinous crimes without being sensible of their guilt, and may even censure vices in others of which they are themselves equally guilty, without being aware that they are herein condemning themselves. That men should censure faults in others which they themselves have little inclination or opportunity to commit may be very well supposed, and easily accounted for. The covetous man may be allowed to censure the spendthrift; and the prodigal, in his turn, to ridicule the miser: for each feels a hearty indignation against the vice he does *not* practise, and especially against the vices which lie in the opposite extreme to his own.

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But how it should happen, that men should be capable of so far imposing upon themselves as to exclaim with vehemence against faults in others of which they are themselves guilty, and yet not perceive that in judging another they are passing sentence upon themselves, it is more difficult to explain. It should, at the first view, seem improbable, that men should be so much strangers at home as not to know what passes in their own bosoms, or to be unacquainted with their own characters; or that they should be capable of viewing themselves and their neighbours under such different aspects, or through such different mediums, as to think those actions innocent in themselves which they are every day severely censuring in others. Innumerable, however, are the examples of this kind of self-deceit which are to be met with in the world. How frequently do we hear bitter complaints of the general prevalence of vice! How ready are we to cen-
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sure one man as proud, another as covetous, a third as hypocritical, and so onward through the whole catalogue of sins! Yet, in the midst of these lamentations and reflections, where is the man who is so honest to himself as to bring home the charge of covetousness, pride, or any other criminal affection and habit, to his own heart? The blame of the degeneracy of manners, so commonly complained of, must lie somewhere; but every man flattereth himself that it doth not lie at his door, and has the ingenuity to turn off the censure from himself to his neighbour. With every symptom in his own case which leads him to pronounce another man diseased, he fancies himself in a state of perfect soundness, or at least finds some favourable circumstance, observed by no one but himself, which persuades him that his condition is not so bad as his neighbour's. That which is a crime in another is in him a virtue, or, at the worst, nothing more than a foible.

What would be covetousness in his neighbour, is in him economy; what would be ill-humour or passion in another, is in him a necessary and laudable spirit: that degree of latitude in conduct which he would not scruple to censure in another under the name of licentiousness, in his own conduct is justified, or at least excused, under the soft appellation of gaiety.

This strange kind of self-delusion, by which men are blind to the very faults in themselves which they remark with a keen and censorious eye in others, cannot be accounted for merely from a want of reflection: for it is impossible for a man to be so inattentive to the general current of his own thoughts and affections, or so little acquainted with the nature of his own actions, as, merely through inadvertency, to form a judgment concerning himself directly contrary to the truth. For the true source of this dangerous deception we must look

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to the power of criminal desires and passions to blind the understanding and pervert the judgment. The same action which, in the moments of dispassionate reflection, is pronounced highly criminal, will, in the hour of temptation, lose its deformity. We make use of a thousand arts to persuade ourselves that the crimes we are strongly impelled by inclination or appetite to commit, will, in our case at least, admit of some apology: we gloss over our favourite vices under the specious colouring of false names; or, where this expedient fails, we have recourse to the plea of human infirmity and frailty. Hence it is that we feel little compunction in the commission of crimes which, in the distant apprehension, would have excited our horror. Hence, too, it is that it becomes so difficult a task to awaken the consciences of offenders to a due sense of their guilt. Had David, before he had seen Bathsheba, been told that he should soon be so far subdued by a

base passion as, for the sake of gratifying his desires, first to rob a faithful servant of his most valued possession, and then treacherously to take away his life, he would, doubtless, have received the prediction with horror. Yet, while he was under the dominion of his criminal passion, he went on from one degree of wickedness to another with so little apprehension of the heinous nature of his offences, that even the pointed and affecting fable of the ewe-lamb was insufficient to kindle one spark of remorse in his conscience, till the prophet said to him—
 “Thou art the man.”

In like manner we frequently find that admonition is the least successful where it is the most necessary. Indirect hints of reproof, though dictated by the purest friendship, the man who is eagerly engaged in the pursuit of criminal pleasure will seldom understand or regard. If this be the case with respect to private admonitions; we can have little reason to

be surprised that general exhortations from the pulpit are attended with so little success. In delineating vicious characters, a personal application to individuals is impracticable. All we can do is to draw the several features with such a degree of attention to real life, that the man to whom they belong may, by strict and impartial examination, discover the likeness and be self-condemned. The most seasonable and pertinent addresses may be delivered without producing their proper effect, unless men will be so just to themselves as to permit conscience to perform the office which Nathan performed to David, and say—"Thou art the man."

The fidelity and resolution which the prophet discovered in making this application, merit particular attention. Had the general representation which he had given of David's conduct, in his well-contrived fable, been sufficient to awaken him to a sense of his guilt, he would, doubtless, gladly have been excused the

214 *Nathan's Reproof of David.*

painful task of making the personal application. In such express terms to charge his prince, to whom he owed respect and obedience, with the most heinous crimes, must have been attended with some hazard of provoking his resentment, instead of leading him to repentance. Nevertheless, he faithfully executed his commission, and boldly said to David—"Thou art the man."

Herein the good prophet is a proper pattern for our imitation. It is an important part of our duty as men, inculcated upon us by an express precept of christianity, "to exhort one another daily, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." A seasonable and prudent reproof is an act of friendship which confers the highest obligation upon the person on whom it is bestowed. It may prevent the disgrace and ruin of one in whose welfare we are deeply interested, and may serve as a faithful guide to direct him in the path to honour and happiness.

happiness. "As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so (saith Solomon) is a wise reprove upon an obedient ear."

But much depends upon the manner in which this office of friendship is conducted; inattention to which is, perhaps, the principal reason why it is so frequently performed without success. The narrative before us suggests several useful hints on this head. It instructs us to guard against assuming an air of authority in our reproofs, and, as much as possible, to conceal ourselves and our design from the person we mean to admonish. In this consists the peculiar excellence of the prophet's method of reproof, by fable or parable. Whilst the hearer is attending to the circumstances of the tale, he loses sight of the narrator and his intention, and instructs and reproofs himself by his own reflections. From the conduct of Nathan we may also learn to admonish each other with gentleness.

216 *Nathan's Reproof of David.*

Though the prophet speaks plainly, he makes use of no angry or reproachful language. Severe upbraidings may make the friend we wish to serve our enemy; satirical reflections may mortify and distress him: but plain and friendly admonition alone is likely to obtain a favourable hearing, and produce the desired effect. Lastly, we are taught by the example of the prophet to be faithful and persevering in the discharge of this difficult duty. It is here that a true friend is in the greatest danger of failing. When we perceive that our reproofs are more likely to give offence than to do good, we are apt either entirely to neglect the wound, or to touch it with so gentle and tender a hand, that we only increase the pain where we wished to effect a cure. Whereas, when milder methods prove ineffectual, friendship requires that we make use of the wholesome severities of direct reproofs and earnest expostulations: and, to encourage us in executing this painful office

office with firmness and fidelity, we read, in the narrative before us, that the personal application which Nathan made of his parable to David was successful. No sooner had he appealed to the conscience of his prince, by saying "Thou art the man," than he penitently confessed his guilt, saying, "I have sinned against the Lord." Who would not pass through all the difficulties which attend the office of private admonition, and even hazard the favour of a friend, from the hope of thus leading him to reflection, repentance, and reformation? With what delight may he who hath converted a sinner from the error of his ways reflect that he hath saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins!

The success of Nathan's admonition should farther teach us to receive the reproofs of friendship with candour and meekness, and to allow them their due influence upon our conduct. David, though a prince, resented not the wise and

218 *Nathan's Reproof of David.*

and faithful rebuke of the prophet of God, but patiently listened to the message he came to deliver, and ingenuously confessed his faults. With such a temper should the admonitions of a friend be always received. We should esteem it the highest proof of kindness our friends can give us, to endeavour to convince us of our faults; and we should manifest our sense of the obligation by an ingenuous confession, as far as we are conscious that the charge is just—by placing peculiar confidence in such a friend for the future—and by immediately reforming our conduct in the particulars which gave rise to the reproof. The sentiment of David on this head ought always to be ours—
“Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head.”

After all, however, if we would effectually correct our errors, we must rely more upon ourselves than upon our friends.

friends. Every man is not blessed with a Nathan, a faithful friend, to perform for him this office of kindness; or if he had, every man has more defects in his character than his friend will choose to censure, or will be able to discover. We must all, therefore, if we be heartily desirous of amending our ways, search and try them for ourselves: and, perhaps, the best expedient for becoming properly sensible of our defects and transgressions is to view them, as David did his heinous crimes, in the character of another. We shall, by this means, in some measure divest ourselves of that self-partiality which might tempt us to overlook or to palliate our own faults; and by placing our characters at a proper distance from us, we shall be able to examine them with distinctness and accuracy.

Finally, that we may "*understand our errors,*" let us frequently retire into ourselves, and scrutinize the hidden recesses of our hearts; and, that we may be preserved

326 *Nathan's Reproof of David.*

served from all self-deception, let us devoutly offer up this prayer to God—
“Search me, O God, and know my heart;
try me, and know my thoughts; and see
if there be any evil way in me, and lead
me in the way everlasting!” Amen.

Against

Against Lying.

PSALM CXIX. 163.

I hate and abhor lying.

AND where is the honest heart that does not?—The vice of lying implies such meanness of spirit, such a depraved—and, if I may hazard the expression—such an *inverted* state of mind, that it is impossible for a soul, which retains any degree of its original dignity, to contemplate it without indignation and abhorrence. Such are the feelings which the character of a liar always excites, whilst we observe it in others. One would naturally expect,

expect, then, that a crime so generally detested should be as generally avoided. One might expect that all mankind would maintain an eternal warfare against this common foe, and for the credit of human nature banish it out of society; or, however, that it would find no refuge but among the most worthless and abandoned of the species.

Yet, where is the man so much a stranger to what is daily passing in the world as not to know, that, in defiance of every obligation of honour and religion, truth is frequently violated in ordinary conversation, in business, and even in the most solemn transactions? They who are most conversant with mankind will be least surprised that David should once have said in his haste—"All men are liars:" and, though they may not be inclined to adopt so severe a censure in its utmost extent, they will be so far from thinking it strange that it should be made a topic of public discourse, that they will think

think nothing more necessary than that mankind should be cautioned against this hateful and contemptible vice.

But, before I attempt further to kindle in your bosoms that honest indignation against the vice of lying which the Psalmist expresses in the text, it will be proper to ascertain, with some degree of accuracy, the nature of a lie, and the grounds of its criminality; especially as moralists have not been perfectly agreed in their explanation of this subject.

The first thing essential to a lie is the declaring as true what is known to be false. To assert what is in reality not agreeable to truth, provided that at the time we make the assertion we think it so, is not a lie, but merely an involuntary misrepresentation. Such misrepresentations may prove injurious; and when the misapprehension which leads to them is the effect of precipitation or passion, they may be culpable: but false assertions only become lies, when the disagreement be-
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tween the words which are spoken and the real truth is known and perceived. To complete the nature of a lie, the falsehood must not only be known to be such, but must be uttered with an intention to deceive.

Words having for the most part a clear and determinate meaning, it is commonly not a difficult matter to perceive in what sense any assertion will be understood by another person. If we are satisfied that our words are not *adapted* to impose upon the person to whom we speak—if we are conscious of no secret *intention* to impose upon him—whatever forms of speech we may use, we are in no danger of incurring the guilt of a lie. For this reason parables, fables, or tales, though not strictly and literally true, do not partake of the nature of a lie: neither those who deliver them, nor those who hear them, considering them as narrations of facts, but only as productions of the imagination, intended for amusement or instruction.

tion. Common forms of speech, expressive of civility and politeness, though, perhaps, the words strictly taken might convey more than the speaker intends, are run down by daily use to a certain current value which is now universally known, so that no one is in danger of expecting from such declarations or professions any thing beyond the ordinary attentions which they are designed to express. In making use of these fashionable modes of address, some care, however, is necessary, that we do not extend this indulgence beyond the bounds of such general custom as leaves no room for deception; for, in cases of this nature, the transition is easy from complaisance to flattery, from politeness to insincerity. Since it is the essence of a lie to utter a falsehood with an intention to deceive; and since all falsehood in its nature tends towards deception, if lying be a crime, it must be our duty to keep at the utmost distance from falsehood of every kind,

both in word and action, wherever it is accompanied with the smallest appearance or hazard of deceit.

That you may perceive the full force of this obligation, and understand how far it extends, let us proceed to inquire into the grounds upon which it rests.

The duty of adhering to truth is not, as some have supposed, a mere civil compact, by which mankind have agreed, for their mutual convenience, not to impose upon one another, and which they may dissolve whenever they please. It is not of the nature of those voluntary contracts which subsist no longer than both the parties adhere to the conditions upon which they are formed. If we examine the structure of the human mind, and attend to the necessary influence of truth upon the happiness of human life, we shall find that this virtue has its foundation deeply laid in the constitution and condition of man.

From a principle which is either originally

ginally implanted in the human mind, or which, with its other powers, is gradually formed by experience and habit, every man has a natural bias towards the truth, which he invariably follows whilst reason retains an uncontrolled authority. Even in childhood the first propensities are towards truth. A child, at first, always speaks what it thinks, and expects every one about it to do the same: it is not without difficulty that it can be persuaded to doubt the veracity of its parents: it gives implicit credit to whatever they assert, and is therefore easily deceived. It is not till we have been misled by bad example, or by some seducing passion, that we ever admit the idea of forsaking the plain and direct road of truth. When the desire of concealing some fault, escaping some punishment, or obtaining some present gratification, entices a young person into a falsehood, it is not without a secret struggle, and a strong sense of shame, that he complies

with the temptation. The same feelings continue to accompany us as we advance in life. Every man carries in his bosom a reverence for truth, which will not suffer him to violate it without reluctance and shame. There is a certain consciousness of meanness and baseness accompanying a lie which renders the liar vile and contemptible even to himself, and which overspreads his face with shame, whenever he is detected. An habitual and notorious liar is universally despised. To a man of honour, nothing is so offensive as the imputation of a lie. To what cause shall we ascribe these facts but to a natural love of truth, and an inward sense of the obligation of veracity, implanted in us by the hand of our Maker?

For what purpose this "law of truth" was "written upon our hearts" will be clearly perceived by every one who observes the necessity of this virtue to the happiness and even to the existence of society.

society. Without mutual confidence, it is evident that no engagements could be made, no contracts framed, no business transacted. It is this which is the grand cement of society, the life of commerce, and the support of public prosperity. To be convinced of this, only for a moment make the supposition that lying were as common as it is at present to speak the truth, and endeavour to imagine the universal confusion and wretchedness that would ensue. No man would trust his property in another's hands; no one's good name would be secure against the lying tongue of slander; no one would give, because no one would accept, a promise; all the pleasure and benefit of conversation would be destroyed, for no one would hearken to assertions to which he could give no credit; nor would any one give himself the trouble to relate what he knew beforehand would obtain no belief; even the most solemn transactions would become nugatory; public offices

inactive

would be unoccupied ; marriage bonds would be broken ; oaths would lose their force ; courts of judicature would be dissolved ; and, in short, men, having no longer any confidence in each other, would have nothing left but to employ cunning against cunning, and violence against violence, till the world should become one universal scene of disorder and misery.

That vice which, carried to its utmost excess, and permitted universally to prevail, would produce all these mischiefs, must be injurious to society exactly in the degree in which it is practised. It is, therefore, certainly for the benefit of mankind, that no indulgence whatever should be given to a crime, the tendencies of which are so fatal ; and it must be the duty of every man to refrain from lying, upon the same principle, and for the same reasons, as it is his duty not to steal or murder. The injury may not, perhaps, in all cases, be so immediate and
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evident with respect to individuals; nay, it may possibly happen that some apparent present benefit may be procured to individuals by a lie. But this can by no means justify, in any instance, the violation of truth, because its general mischievous tendency with respect to society still remains.

Cases have, I know, been supposed, in which the immediate advantage to be obtained by a lie has been so certain and important, that it has been thought by some moralists a sufficient reason for considering them as exceptions to the general law which prohibits the violation of truth. But this opinion rests upon the false supposition that no evil is produced by a lie, the immediate effect of which is good. Whereas, in order to decide the point fairly, all the bad effects which are likely to be produced by the falsehood in question—the probability that, by awakening suspicion, it may defeat its own end—the injury it may do to the

mind of the person who utters it, by lessening his reverence for truth—and the unhappy influence which every example of this kind must have upon spectators—ought to be well considered. Besides all this, we must take into the account the general effect which the admission of the principle, that truth may in some cases be violated, would have upon society: first, in tempting men to be guilty of prevarication and deceit, in cases where the benefit of others is only a secondary and doubtful consideration subordinate to their own personal emolument; and, secondly, in relaxing in the minds of men that sacred regard for truth which is of such high importance to the well-being of society. Let all the consequences of allowing any exceptions to the general law of veracity be fairly examined and duly considered, and it will, I doubt not, be acknowledged, that the obligation of this law cannot be suspended by any consideration of private benefit or personal

personal character, but is strictly universal.

In farther confirmation of this conclusion, let us appeal to facts.

Have those parents, who, under the notion of deceiving children for their benefit, have made use of artifice and falsehood as instruments of authority and discipline, ever found the expedient answer any good purpose? If for a while they have been amused with *false promises*, have they not soon discovered the imposition? Have not vexation and fretfulness attended the discovery? Has it not taught them to suspect—perhaps to despise—those whom nature would otherwise have taught them to regard with entire confidence and esteem? Has it not even taught *them* to practise upon the deceivers themselves the arts of deception, and thus initiated them into the mysteries of duplicity and falsehood, whilst they ought to have been practising the plain and simple lessons of honesty and truth?

Review the history of religion, to remark the innumerable mischiefs which have been brought upon mankind by adhering to this single principle, that the support and propagation of religion is an end sufficiently important to justify any means by which it may be accomplished. It was under the sanction of this principle that the whole system of pagan theology, among the ancient Greeks and Romans, was established, and that the credit of the fictions which they passed with so much success upon the vulgar was supported by oracles, augury, and other arts of imposture. It was this notion which led many of the fathers of the christian church, for several ages after the time of the apostles, to make pretensions to miraculous powers, which there is no good reason to believe they possessed, and to practise other *pious frauds*, in order to counteract the similar operations of their gentile adversaries. It has been this which has continued these practices in
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the Romish church, and has reconciled many to the continuance of absurd creeds and superstitious practices, which they have secretly disapproved. In all this the plea has been, the necessity of imposing upon mankind for their benefit. The truth is, it has in all ages been too much the practice of those who ought to have enlightened the world to keep it in darkness, that they might the more easily keep it in subjection. Men have been treated as children; and the plea has been, that they were incapable of being treated otherwise. It has been owing to this fatal mistake that the dominion of ignorance and superstition has been so generally established, and has lasted so long. The experiment is yet to be made, whether simple truth be not in itself possessed of sufficient powers to govern the world.

I might further illustrate and confirm the doctrine of the universal obligation of truth, by shewing that all the deceptions and impositions which are practised in
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civil communities—or between one nation and another—are founded upon narrow and destructive principles of policy; and that it would be much happier for the world if all state intrigues were superseded by the universal adoption of the simple law of honesty and truth.

But I shall, perhaps, fill up the remainder of this discourse more usefully, by shewing that in all those cases, in private life, in which men violate the truth in hope of profiting by their dishonesty, they judge wrong and act foolishly. It is so very evident that there can be neither pleasure nor credit in lying, that, if men could be convinced that there is, upon a fair computation, no profit in it, one might hope that this shameful and despicable vice would be banished from society.

Of all the kinds of lies from which men expect to reap advantage, certainly none are more promising than those which are made use of in the transactions of trade

trade and commerce. Falsehoods of various sorts are so common in these transactions, that one would almost imagine men had discovered a shorter and surer path to riches than honesty. It is sometimes even urged in favour of these practices that they are become necessary. It is alledged, that though much to be lamented, it is a certain fact that falsehood is now so commonly practised, that it is impossible to be upon a level with the rest of the world, in the prospect of success, without sometimes doing in this respect as others do. But this, unquestionably, is a mere delusion. Falsehood, whilst it remains concealed, may enjoy a temporary advantage: but the deception cannot last long; and, when it is once detected, all its boasted advantages are at an end. Whereas the honest man, whatever inconveniences he may have to struggle with at first, will be continually rising in public esteem and confidence, and increasing the number of his friends, and may,

[may, with an ordinary share of skill and prudence, entertain a reasonable expectation of success. " The lying tongue is but for a moment ; but the lip of truth is established for ever."

From the frequent use which is made of the weapon of falsehood in the violence of party disputes, one would suppose that it had been in these cases found to be an excellent instrument of offence. Nothing is more common, on such occasions, than for each party to load their opponents with abuse of the grossest kind, and to give totally different and even contradictory representations of the same facts and the same characters. Men who in their private concerns would scorn the imputation of a falsehood, will often assist in the circulation of a lie to serve their party ; not, perhaps, with a perfect knowledge that it is so, but without giving themselves much trouble to examine into its truth. If, however, they hope to promote the cause they have at heart

heart by such management, they will be much deceived; for the lies which are circulated upon such occasions are "arrows shot into the air, which hurt no one."

Much seems to be expected from another kind of lies, which are, perhaps, at least as common as any other—those which arise from vanity. From this principle people often ascribe to themselves actions and dispositions to which they have no just claim; impute their good deeds to better motives than they deserve, or magnify their virtues or their talents far beyond the truth: or, if they do not immediately make themselves the objects of exaggerated panegyric, vanity still prompts them to magnify whatever they relate beyond the truth. The things which they have seen, the stories which they have heard, the transactions with which they have been conversant, are heightened in the description with extraordinary and marvellous circumstances,

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in order to lead the hearer to some conclusion in favour of their abilities, accomplishments, or good fortune. In all this people employ falsehood in the service of vanity, hoping hereby to purchase, at an easy rate, a degree of respect and consequence which they could not otherwise obtain: and for a time the artifice may succeed; for suspicion is less watchful against impositions of this kind than against those which are employed for the purposes of gain. But Vanity is, in these cases, commonly betrayed at last by her own auxiliaries. The powers of invention, employed in this way, acquire strength by exercise. One exaggeration leads to another and greater: one false story, which obtains credit, produces another less probable; till at length the bubble of false reputation, which vanity had raised, bursts of itself; and the boaster, disappointed and mortified by the very expedients by which he hoped to have gratified his ruling passion, is obliged to shrink

shrink back into his natural insignificance, not without an additional load of that galling infamy which always attends the detection of imposture.

There is yet another kind of lying which one could hardly suppose that any one would practise, if it were not for the secret gratification which it affords, namely, the lie of detraction and slander: and, perhaps, this may be an exception to the general observation, that there can be no pleasure in lying. Perhaps there may be minds so perverted, that they can delight in those things which would most of all distress the worthy and good; there may be persons capable of finding their highest gratification in seeing merit depressed, innocence stained with infamy, domestic peace destroyed, and all the fair fruits of a well-earned reputation blasted by their malignant slanders. If this be the case—if such characters really exist—I shall only say, that the pleasure they experience is dearly purchased with the

loss of all that wise men hold most valuable—self-approbation, respect among men, and the favour of Heaven. Such a liar must be his own tormentor; for, as the wise son of Sirach saith, “his disposition is dishonourable, and his shame is ever with him:” nor is it possible that he should escape the judgment denounced in the holy scriptures against the man “who loveth and maketh a lie.”

Indeed, this latter consideration extends beyond the particular case of slanderous falsehood to every kind of lying, and ought to operate as the most powerful of all arguments to dissuade men from living in the practice of this heinous vice; for it is the express doctrine of revelation, that “all liars shall have their part in the second death.”

What hath been said is, I trust, abundantly sufficient to convince you that lying is in all cases a foolish, contemptible, and hateful practice. Nor can it be necessary to add any thing farther upon the subject,

subject, unless it be—chiefly for the sake of young persons, who are sometimes betrayed into this vice before they are aware of its heinous nature and fatal consequences—these two plain but important precepts.

First, guard against every approach towards this vice. Do not trifle with truth even in jest: the consequence may be more serious than you apprehend. Never allow yourselves to make use of any kind of equivocation; or to use words which, though strictly speaking true, will probably be so understood as to occasion deception. Equivocation partakes essentially of the nature of a lie, being intended to deceive; and every advance towards the verge of falsehood tends to destroy that delicate sense of honour and duty which is the best guard against vice.

Secondly, cherish in your hearts, as your best treasure, the principle of integrity, and let it govern all your actions. Always mean well, and act uprightly,

and you will have no occasion for concealment or dissimulation. Men form base designs and commit criminal actions, and then call in the aid of lying, that their crimes may pass undiscovered; thus guilt is doubled only that it may be concealed. Do always that which you would not be ashamed to confess to all mankind; be in reality what you would have the world think you, and you will have no use for falsehood and deceit. I will conclude in the words of the Psalmist:

“What man is he that loveth life, and seeketh many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.”

The Fear of Man a dangerous Snare.

PROVERBS xxix. 25.

The fear of man bringeth a snare.

It cannot be the design of Solomon in these words to discourage every kind of solicitude concerning the opinion which others entertain of us, and every degree of attention to the preservation of our good name. The love of reputation, and consequently the dread of infamy, is certainly a natural and useful principle. To be destitute of this principle is to want one of the most effectual guards of vir-

tue, and one of the most powerful incentives to great and meritorious actions. We must not, then, suppose that the wise man intended, in the maxim of the text, any thing farther than to prevent the misapplication or abuse of a natural principle, by teaching, that where a regard to the approbation, or a fear of the censure of men becomes predominant, there is danger lest it should betray the person who is under its controul into a criminal violation of duty. Whenever it happens that there is an interference between the claims of conscience and religion and those of the sense of honour and love of fame, so that a man cannot secure the approbation of his own mind and the favour of his Maker without hazarding his interest in the good-will of some of his fellow-creatures, or exposing himself to ridicule or censure, then "the fear of men becomes a snare;" and he who, in such a case, has not the fortitude and piety to hazard the displeasure or contempt

contempt of a mortal like himself, rather than expose himself to the righteous judgment of Heaven, falls by this snare.

It may be of some use to us all, and especially to the young and unexperienced, to be apprised of the numerous hazards to which virtue is exposed from this quarter, and to be reminded of the most effectual expedients for securing ourselves from the snares which arise from the *fear of man*.

Different situations create, in this respect, different temptations. There have been times in which the professors of true religion could not publicly avow their principles, and adhere to the pure worship of the one true God, without exposing themselves to severe sufferings; when they were required to renounce their creed, and profess opinions and conform to practices contrary to their judgment and conscience, at the peril of liberty, property, and life. In these circumstances it required no common share of integrity and resolution to follow the

path of duty through all the terrors of persecution; and, therefore, it was then no unusual thing to see men of unsteady principles and timid tempers making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. There have been times, on the other hand, in which high professions of zeal and sanctity have been the most effectual means, not only of gaining popularity, but of being advanced to stations of distinction and emolument. Worldly interest and religious profession were then on the same side of the balance; and it was no wonder if multitudes seized the fortunate opportunity of serving God and Mammon at the same time—if there were then more of the appearance of piety than of the reality. The temptation then was to pretend to more religion than a man really possessed: accordingly men, at that time, talked about religion more than they practised it: this was the age of hypocrites.

These times are now past: public opinions

nions and manners have taken a different turn; and it is in a very different way that the fear of man now bringeth a snare.

Men are not now in danger of being deterred from the profession of religion by the fear of persecution; but they are in danger of being laughed out of their religion by the unprincipled and profane. They are not now tempted to put on the cloak of religion to hide their vices; on the contrary, they are ashamed of the little religion they have, and even affect a degree of libertinism in principle and manners which does not accord with their real sentiments and habits, to avoid the sarcastic sneers of their companions for unfashionable preciseness and scrupulosity. How often is it seen, that young persons, merely from the want of courage to meet the ridicule of the profane and licentious, or from a foolish ambition of being applauded for freedom and spirit, adopt from their companions a li-
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centious latitude, both in language and action, to which they would otherwise be little inclined! Allow me, on this subject, to make a direct appeal to experience, and to ask whether there be not some among you who have, on some occasions, contrary to your settled principles and established habits, perhaps contrary, too, to the express resolution which you had formed, suffered the importunity, the raillery, or the example of your companions, to seduce you into intemperance and licentiousness? Through a weak pliancy of temper, a desire of gaining the ill-judged and ill-bestowed praises of companions who are themselves highly culpable, or a fear of incurring their derision, have you not sometimes been drawn into vicious excesses, into which appetite and passion alone would never have seduced you? Wherever facts of this kind have occurred, they have furnished a decisive proof of the truth of the maxim—"The fear of man bringeth a snare."

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To pursue this appeal still further :

Highly as you, doubtless, value your own good name, and tender as you probably imagine yourself to be of your neighbour's reputation, let me ask, has it never happened that you have, in conversation, heard a worthy character aspersed, when in your own mind you have been fully convinced of his innocence, and, perhaps, have had it in your power to justify him ; and yet, through fear of contradicting and offending one whom you, perhaps, regard as your superior, or in whose friendship you were interested, have not dared to open your lips in his defence ? In such circumstances, has it never happened, that through excessive complaisance, mixed, perhaps, with a latent spark of ill-nature, you have joined in the uncharitable censure which you were conscious you were unable to support ?

Another case in which the maxim of the text is frequently exemplified, is the neglect

neglect of that important duty of friendship, faithful reproof. I see my friend gradually forming habits which threaten to be ruinous to his health—his reputation—his fortune—or his virtue. I am exceedingly desirous that his error may be corrected before it be too late. I am sensible that it is my duty, as his friend, to admonish him freely. Yet, because I am apprehensive that a faithful rebuke may give him offence, and, perhaps, create an alienation between us, I postpone from day to day the necessary, though painful, service. What is such conduct, but sacrificing the dear and sacred interests of friendship and virtue to that fear of man which bringeth a snare?

A man, whose general conduct is upright and honourable, may be supposed in a situation in which he will be in great danger of being seduced from his integrity by the influence of this principle. Conceive such a man connected

in business with persons of less honest principles than himself: imagine him strongly importuned to join them in some scheme of gain which, though lucrative, is iniquitous and oppressive: if his disposition be feeble and timid, his chief difficulty will arise from the fear of disobliging his friends; and if he yield, it will be rather through pusillanimity than through avarice.

In the execution of great public designs, and the discharge of important public offices, nothing is more necessary than a mind superior to the fear of men. It is this which gives stability and consistency to those measures which wisdom has planned and public spirit dictated. To men of that firm and intrepid spirit which "fears not the reproaches of men, nor is afraid of their revilings," the world has been indebted for the accomplishment of every great attempt to banish superstition and false religion. Had Luther feared

feared the faces of men, he would not have been immortalized as the first author of the reformation. Though such undaunted courage as he discovered may be less necessary in the present settled state of the church, it is still exceedingly desirable that the ministers of religion should possess such a degree of fortitude and magnanimity as to raise them above all timid apprehension of giving offence. This alone can enable them to declare the truth without disguise, and to admonish and reprove with all authority. It was the command of the Lord to the prophet Isaiah—"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet: shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." And to Jeremiah, when he sent him forth as "a prophet to the nations," he said—"Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak: be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee, saith the Lord."

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In the several instances in which I have exemplified the observation of Solomon, that “the fear of man bringeth a snare,” men act wrong, not so much through any criminal habit or passion, as from an apprehension of incurring resentment, reproach, or ridicule. This apprehension for a time suppresses the principles of piety and benevolence, and either diminishes the merit of the man who is under its influence, or stains his character with occasional blemishes: and happy is the man who, having been once caught in this snare, perceives his danger, and by a resolute effort escapes. He may adopt the language of the Psalmist—“Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given me a prey to mine enemies: my soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and I am escaped.” For I add, the fear of man often proves a destructive and *fatal* snare.

Young persons, who are peculiarly susceptible

ceptible of the impressions of praise or blame, are frequently entangled in this snare, till they are wholly incapable of recovering their innocence, and fall into irremediable ruin. Having through unfortunate connexions, or an injudicious and precipitate choice, become the companions of men of licentious principles and manners, a desire of rendering themselves agreeable to their associates, and a secret dread of ridicule, induce them by degrees to accommodate themselves to their manners. At first, indeed, their consciences remonstrate; the principles of religion, instilled into their minds by education, check their career; and they taste the cup of guilty pleasure with a trembling hand. But these restraints at length lose their power: their profligate companions become their only counsellors; and the sacred name of friendship is prostituted to the service of vice. Respect for the judgment of their wise and religious parents and friends; the desire
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of enjoying their approbation, and the fear of incurring their displeasure—natural and laudable principles, which have always great influence upon the minds of virtuous youth—are converted into contempt: even the fear of God is despised as the mere effect of a narrow education; and nothing is thought worthy of attention but the applauses and caresses of “young men void of understanding,” and those criminal pleasures which are to be found in their society. The inevitable consequence is, that they pass on with their companions from one species and degree of vice to another, till their health is destroyed, their reputation ruined, their faculties debased, and all the bright prospects with which they entered upon life, both with respect to this world and another, are annihilated—till they are convinced, by fatal experience, of a truth of which they have often been reminded in vain, that “a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

If it be asked, whence it happens that the fear of man, or a desire of avoiding the censures and obtaining the applauses of others, is so dangerous a snare; I answer, this may be in part owing to that complying and obliging disposition which, under proper restrictions, is an amiable quality, especially in young minds, and in part to a natural weakness and timidity of temper. But the principal cause undoubtedly is, a want of firm and steady principles of virtue and religion, and of a deliberate resolution, seriously formed and frequently recollected, to pursue an uniform course of wise and virtuous conduct.

Are you, then—I address myself particularly to those who are in the early part of life—desirous of escaping this snare? Make it your first object to establish in your minds rational and consistent principles of action; and your first care to lay down to yourselves a plan of living which your best judgment may approve, and

and which you may prosecute through the whole of life, without laying any foundation for self-reproach when you shall have finished your course. Having laid this solid foundation of a wise and happy life, exert that manly and independent spirit which will raise you superior to the tyrannical influence of fashion and example, and give a dignified consistency to your character. Since your Creator hath given you reason and conscience to direct you, and made you capable of rising to perfection in intellectual and moral excellence, disdain to submit your judgment and actions to the controul of men who have neither wisdom nor steadiness sufficient to regulate their own conduct. Through fear of losing the friendship, incurring the censures, or falling under the ridicule, of such men, resign not the solid and lasting satisfactions of a self-approving mind, and all the honours and rewards which Virtue bestows upon her votaries. Observe and

follow the advice of the wise son of Sirach—"Be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul; for there is a shame which bringeth sin, and there is a shame which is glory and grace: accept no man's person against thy soul; and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall."

Lastly, as the most effectual security against the undue fear of men, fear God. By frequently contemplating the Supreme Deity as he is displayed in his works and in his dispensations, impress upon your minds a lively sense of his universal presence and sovereign dominion. Daily recollect your continual and necessary dependence upon him; and reflect, that his favour is to be desired, and his displeasure to be dreaded, above every thing else. What can the most excellent or powerful of your fellow-creatures do to secure, increase, and perpetuate your happiness, in comparison with what you have already received,

received, and are encouraged hereafter to expect, from your Almighty Benefactor ?

Where is the man whose judgment of characters can deserve to be brought into the most distant competition with that of the Great Being who searches the heart, and whose judgment is always according to truth ? Or what consequences are to be apprehended from the reproaches or censures of men which can deserve the slightest attention, when compared with the effects of his displeasure, who has the existence and the happiness of every creature entirely in his hands ? When, therefore, you apprehend yourselves in danger of suffering persecution, reproach, or ridicule, for your steady adherence to truth and virtue, and feel yourself in some danger of yielding to the impulse of that "fear of man which bringeth a snare," fortify your mind with the considerations which religion suggests, and say with the apostle Paul—"It is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment : he that judg-

262 *The Fear of Man a dangerous Snare.*

eth me is the Lord. Hear, and obey the command of our blessed Saviour :

“ I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.”

Decorum

Decorum of Character recom- mended.

ROMANS xiii. 13.

Let us walk honestly as in the day.

THE term *honesty*, which in modern acceptation expresses only one branch of equity, was used by former writers in our own country, and among the Romans, from whom the word is borrowed, in a much more extensive sense, as denoting all those moral qualities which are in themselves becoming, and are peculiarly adapted to procure respect and esteem. In this sense the term is always

264 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

used by our translators of the New Testament, particularly in the following passages. St. Peter exhorts his fellow-christians to abstain from fleshly lusts, having their conversation *honest* among the Gentiles; that is, supporting a fair and reputable character before the world. St. Paul exhorts the christians at Rome to “provide things *honest* in the sight of all men; that is, to maintain a conduct which should procure them general esteem: and he instructs the Philippians—whatsoever things are *honest*, or becoming, and respectable—to think on these things. When the apostles were giving advice to the christians at Jerusalem concerning the choice of deacons, they said—“Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of *honest* report;” that is, seven men who, by a long course of exemplary conduct, have established a reputable character among their fellow-christians.

This is the sense in which we are to understand the term in our text. The

word

Decorum of Character recommended. 265

word in the original Greek which is here rendered *honestly*, is the same which, in another epistle, (1 Cor. xiv. 40.) is translated by the term *decently*. "Let all things be done *decently* and in order."

The spirit of the exhortation is this:

"Since the day of Christian Light is risen upon us, and we are called to appear before the world as professors of the pure and excellent religion of Christ, let us walk decently and gracefully, behaving with such propriety and decorum, that our character and profession, instead of becoming a subject of contempt or ridicule, may engage universal admiration. As it is usual, in open day and before the public, to appear in a becoming dress, and to refrain from every thing which would appear ridiculous or give offence; so let us, considering ourselves as perpetually surrounded with spectators, preserve an uniform decency in our conduct, refraining from all unbecoming, dishonourable, and disgraceful actions, and adorning our
profession

266 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

profession and character by every thing which is amiable and praiseworthy."

Many important particulars are included in that graceful walk which the apostle here recommends.

If we be desirous of following the exhortation, "Let us walk gracefully as in the day," our first care must be to abstain from all such practices as are contrary to the natural sense of decorum, and universally considered as shameful. Of this kind is every violation of the natural laws of sobriety and chastity. It was with a particular reference to these shameful vices, to which some of the new converts to christianity at Rome were probably still addicted, that the apostle wrote the precept of the text—"Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness." And certainly there is nothing which more effectually degrades a man's character among the wise and virtuous part of the world than the excessive indulgence

dulgence of the animal appetites. Every one who has a just idea of the dignity of human nature considers these appetites as the inferior part of our frame, by which we are allied to the brute creation, and esteems it disgraceful in a rational being to be inordinately addicted to sensual pleasure. This conception, so natural to the virtuous mind, is the parent of delicacy and modesty, those watchful guards of innocence. It is not till the finer sensibilities of the mind are destroyed by a long course of criminal excesses, that a man becomes capable of the most heinous violations of order and decorum without concealment or disguise. So powerful is the natural sense of shame, and dread of contempt and infamy, in men not perfectly brutalized, that there are few who choose to be guilty of intemperance and excess in the open face of day. "They that are drunken," says the apostle, "are drunken in the night." The strict observance of the rules of temperance

268 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

perance is in itself highly decent and becoming, and will always be thought so by the virtuous part of mankind. I know of no exceptions to this remark. If there be any—if false notions of hospitality and the arbitrary customs of society have rendered it, in any instance, unfashionable, and in some sort disreputable, for a man to confine himself within the limits of moderation; such a custom, by whatever authority or example it may be supported, is a violation of decorum—an insult upon virtue—which cannot but be highly criminal. It is certainly much more becoming and reputable, as well as meritorious, peremptorily to decline irregularities of every kind, than to make a sacrifice of health, reason, and innocence, to mistaken notions of civility or conviviality.

In like manner it is essential to the graceful conduct recommended in the text, that we refrain from the indulgence of every other base and sordid, or violent
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and troublesome, passion. Nothing is more truly despicable than a narrow, selfish spirit, which, to gain its own ends, will condescend to mean actions, and all the arts of low cunning. Avarice is the vice of little minds. It is impossible that those who are under its dominion should form any great conceptions, or rise to any dignity of character. The covetous man must divest himself of that sordid spirit which bends him to the earth, before he can walk with that erect and noble air which distinguishes generous minds. Mammon, according to the description of our divine poet, was "the least erected spirit that fell from heaven." Pride, too, is a passion which, whilst it assumes to itself high claims of dignity, and demands respect from every quarter, lays itself open to ridicule and contempt. Every one perceives the absurdity of making pretensions which we are not able to support, and of valuing ourselves above measure upon trivial or ordinary

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accomplishments: every one, therefore, despises, and takes pleasure in mortifying, a proud man. He who is haughty in his general deportment, who treats his superiors with rudeness, behaves among his equals with reserve, and assumes an overbearing and contemptuous air towards his inferiors, whatever accomplishments he may possess, will most certainly be neglected and despised. The difference between true dignity and pride is easily perceived; and it should be remembered, that to bear a haughty air and a proud look is not, in the sense of the text, to walk gracefully. Violent sallies of resentment, and constant habits of peevishness and fretfulness, are also highly unbecoming. The former are accompanied with expressions of passion which, could they be seen by the angry man himself, would soon convince him that there is something contemptible, as well as offensive, in rage. The latter cast a perpetual veil over the brightest accomplishments;

ments; and, whilst they furnish endless causes of vexation, afford the spectator frequent occasions of ridicule. Both are wholly inconsistent with the profession of that religion which classes gentleness among its leading virtues, and whose divine Author was "meek and lowly of heart."

Where these and all other base passions and disgraceful habits are subdued, much is done towards acquiring that decorum and propriety of character which is recommended in the text; for it is true, with respect to moral conduct as well as external demeanour, that he who has corrected in his behaviour what was unbecoming has made considerable advances in good manners. But as, besides this, many positive accomplishments are necessary to form a polite address and graceful air, so there are many moral qualities of great intrinsic value, and universally admired by the world, which must be added to finish the gratefulness and

272 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

and beauty of the christian character. From these I shall select, as peculiarly worthy of your attention in the conduct of life, the following—Consistency, magnanimity, courtesy, and generosity.

Nothing gives a more lively idea of the graceful and becoming than to see a man acting steadily in character, and always consistent with himself. As there is a certain external appearance and manner suitable to every age, profession, and rank in life, so there is a certain propriety of moral conduct which arises from the natural abilities, the temper, the situation, employment, and other circumstances, of individuals: and as a careful attention to the one is thought becoming in society, so the uniform observance of the other is essential to moral decorum. When we see a man, at an early period of life, fixing a plan of conduct for himself with deliberate judgment and an independent spirit, and, after due consideration of his
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own dispositions and situation, entering upon and prosecuting this plan, without suffering himself to be diverted from it by the influence of fashion or example; when we see such a man persevering in the same character of sobriety, integrity, and steady virtue, through every vicissitude of life, we respect his principles, we admire his firmness of mind, we contemplate his character with a perception of propriety and perfection similar to that with which we survey a noble edifice, formed upon a regular plan, and completed by the hand of an able architect. We always mean to express a high degree of respect when we say of a man, in the way of eulogy, that he is a consistent character.

Magnanimity, another quality which commands admiration, may be considered as discovering itself either in a steady adherence to virtue in general, or in the bold and resolute execution of great designs for the public good. The man who

274 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

steadily pursues that course of action which he judges to be right, without suffering himself to be diverted from his purpose by the enticements of pleasure, or disheartened by the prospect of difficulties and hazards, discovers a great and noble mind, and commands universal esteem. Fixed and firm in his resolution, inflexible to ill, and stedfast in that which is good, he supports the dignity of a virtuous character; and gives the world an example of greatness in moral conduct which resembles the hardy and heroic spirit of a valiant general, who at the head of his army marches, with regular and determined steps, against the foe. We are still farther struck with admiration when we see a man of superior abilities and distinguished merit undertaking designs of great public utility, and executing them at the certain expence of private ease and profit, and at the hazard of his property, liberty, and life. In such a man we contemplate a mind superior

perior to vulgar passions and prejudices, capable of despising luxurious indolence when it would interfere with the public good, and possessed of strength and constancy sufficient to sustain the severest shocks of fortune. We look up with veneration to such exalted characters, and imagine human nature allied to the divine.

A character which to the noble qualities of consistency and magnanimity adds the attractive graces of courtesy and affability, acquires from this circumstance additional lustre. There is a much nearer alliance between these virtues than may, perhaps, at first view be perceived; for it has always been found that the noblest spirits are the most gentle. When the heroic virtues are united with the milder affections, the admiration which they excite is softened into love. Every one is satisfied and happy in the society of the man who clothes all his actions in the graceful garb of easy familiarity and unaffected

good-humour. The world will readily overlook many foibles and indiscretions in one who cultivates this amiable temper, and will perceive an additional splendour surrounding his virtues whilst they view them through this enchanting medium. Courtesy is a quality which every one perceives and admires. It is peculiarly pleasing to those who are in inferior stations to be treated by their governors, benefactors, and superiors, with affability and kindness. Such manners in the great add weight to their advice, influence to their example, and value to the favours they bestow.

The quality which finishes the truly respectable and amiable character is *generosity*; that noble disposition which discovers itself in a thousand forms of beneficence. It enables a man, in the midst of insults and injuries, to be collected and serene, and to enjoy the triumph of forgiveness. It raises him superior to the stormy atmosphere of party-disputes, and
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gives him that quiet possession of himself which enables him to perform the benevolent and useful office of the peacemaker. It inclines him to avoid unnecessary occasions of offence, and to yield, as far as virtue and prudence will permit, to the customs, humours, and prejudices, of others. It prompts him to treat the failings of his neighbour with candour, to conceal the fault which he cannot but observe, and to extenuate the crime which he is not able wholly to excuse. In fine, it inclines him to look around him with a watchful eye for opportunities of usefulness, to extend his kind offices as far as his abilities and possessions will permit, and to send his good wishes to the ends of the earth. Is it possible that a man of this spirit should fail of obtaining universal respect and affection? Can it be, that such a man should not always be beheld with united emotions of veneration and love? He can never want a friend in the hour of necessity: he may, perhaps,

278 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

find one who would even protect his life at the hazard of his own. "Peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."

Such are the beautiful assemblage of virtues included in that graceful conduct which the apostle recommends, when he says—"Let us walk honestly as in the day." Where is the bosom which is not warmed with ambition to obtain, by such honourable means, the esteem and applause of mankind? The love of reputation is so natural a passion, that we can scarcely believe it possible that any human being should be entirely destitute of it. When this passion is properly regulated and innocently gratified, it is productive of such refined pleasures and important advantages, that it would be absurd to wish it eradicated from the human heart, or to suppose that it ought to be totally suppressed, or rigorously restrained. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Be it then the constant

stant object of your ambition to secure and preserve a bright and unspotted reputation, by walking "gracefully as in the day."

As you are pursuing your way through life, frequently recollect that the eye of the world is upon you—that your brethren are forming a favourable or unfavourable judgment concerning your characters. Remember, that the vicious part of mankind are watching your conduct for an occasion of reproach—that the wise and good around you are remarking your virtues with pleasure—and, particularly, that those who are more immediately interested in your welfare are anxiously attentive to your behaviour; and that the same attachment which inclines them to remark your faults with candour, will oblige them to observe with regret every impropriety and indecorum in your conduct. If you in this manner frequently consider yourselves as standing upon the public theatre of the world,

280 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

and performing your respective parts before a multitude of spectators, the idea will not fail to render you cautious and vigilant in the conduct of life. In the midst of such an assembly you will be ambitious, not only to escape censure, but to obtain applause.

You all very reasonably pay some regard to appearances in your common intercourse with the world. You choose, as far as you are able, to provide for yourselves and your dependents, not only such things as are necessary for your subsistence, but such as are decent and reputable. One of the first motives to industry, with many people, and one of the principal causes of extravagance, is the desire of making a figure in the world. In this polished age a general attention is paid to the cultivation of exterior accomplishments. Much has been said concerning *the graces*; and agreeable, and even useful, as they undoubtedly are, a more than reasonable stress has been laid

upon them. Let me exhort you, my brethren, to carry your taste for a decent appearance and graceful manners beyond mere externals, and to be, at least, as much concerned to make a decent and reputable appearance in your moral conduct as in your dress, your habitations, or your exterior behaviour. So shall your virtuous manners produce you a plentiful harvest of reputation whilst you live, and secure you the honour of a fair fame after your decease; for the memory of the righteous is blessed.

I must not conclude without adding, that the same virtues which will, in the natural course of things, procure you the esteem and respect of mankind, will also lay a sure foundation for those pure pleasures which result from the consciousness of having merited the esteem you have acquired—a consciousness which far outweighs the satisfaction arising from the applause of men, and which, if this should at any time, through prejudice or caprice,
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be withheld, will abundantly repay you for the disappointment. At the same time, they will not fail to obtain for you the approbation of the Supreme Infallible Judge of merit, and to secure to you those everlasting honours and rewards which he has promised for good men in the future world.

Nor let it be deemed a consideration of no moment, if I add still farther, that by *walking gracefully* in the course of christian duty, you will reflect credit upon the religion which you profess, and afford your fellow-christians the benefit of your good example. When the world observes your characters adorned with those qualities which are universally approved and admired, they will not fail to form a good opinion of the principles and maxims by which you are governed, and of the religion which you profess. They will have ocular demonstration that christianity is not a mere speculative system, but a practical institution, admirably calculated to

Decorum of Character recommended. 283

to produce the fruits of righteousness, and promote the happiness of mankind. By the lustre of your fair example you may hope to draw off the attention of many around you from that of the multitude who do evil, and to fire them with emulation to arrive at your eminence of character, and to share with you the present honours and future rewards of virtue. You may even hope to render an important service to the community to which you are related, by giving some check to the progress of vice, and some countenance and support to public order and virtue.

Let your concern, then, for the honour of religion, for the welfare of your fellow-creatures, and for your own reputation, engage you to "walk gracefully as in the day" in the exemplary practice of every christian virtue. Whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honest or becoming; whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure;
whatsoever

284 *Decorum of Character recommended.*

whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things, and practise them.

Continual

Continual Advances towards Perfection in Knowledge and Virtue recommended.

HEBREWS VI. I.

Let us go on to perfection.

It is an opinion maintained by some modern writers who have examined the structure of the human mind, that a desire of completing what we have once begun is to be ranked among the primary principles in human nature. In support of this notion they appeal to experience, and remark how universally it is seen, that when men are heartily engaged in any pursuit, whether it be in its nature important

important or trifling, they are loth to relinquish it before they have accomplished their design; and that this frequently happens in cases in which it would be difficult to assign any motive for persevering except the pleasure of finishing what we have begun, and seeing the work we have undertaken, or the design we have formed, brought to perfection.

Whether this opinion is to be placed among the valuable discoveries of modern philosophy, or is only to be regarded as one of those ingenious conjectures which are the fruit of learned leisure, may perhaps merit a farther examination among those who are fond of such speculations. It is, however, of more importance to us to inquire what practical use may be made of a principle which, whether it be primary, or only derived and subordinate, must be allowed to belong to the human mind, and to have a considerable influence upon our actions. Since we are formed capable of continual improvement,

ment, and feel a natural desire of advancing from one degree of excellence to another, it becomes us to employ our most serious thoughts, and our best judgment, in determining wherein the true perfection of human nature consists, and by what means this end may be most successfully accomplished.

The subject of christian perfection is too extensive to be exhausted in a single discourse. I shall not at present attempt even the general outline, but shall confine myself to two leading branches of that perfection towards which it is our duty to be continually aspiring, *religious knowledge* and *virtuous manners*, with the particular view of suggesting to your thoughts such practical rules on each of these heads as may be particularly applicable to the present state of opinions and morals.

It must be obvious to every one who observes the present state of religious knowledge, that much yet remains to be

done before we arrive at perfection. We live, it is true, in an age in which knowledge of every kind is encouraged, and is daily making rapid advances; and in which the dominion of bigotry and persecution, those avowed enemies to free inquiry, is continually declining. We no longer hear of the infallibility of the priesthood, or of the obligation of implicit faith on the part of the people. Every man is at liberty to form his system of religious opinions for himself; and few persons, who are sincerely desirous of proving all things that they may hold fast that which is good, need be at a loss for proper means and helps for executing the laudable design. It is one great end of public preaching to assist men in correcting their errors and prejudices, and in forming a true judgment upon the most interesting subjects: and a variety of valuable treatises on the nature and foundation of morals, and on the evidences and doctrines of religion natural

tural and revealed, have been published, and may be easily procured. But, after all, it is too evident that men do not, in fact, make such advances in religious knowledge as might be expected. Some persons, notwithstanding they have been accustomed from their infancy to attend upon public lectures of instruction, have paid so little regard to the subjects of discourse as to have formed no settled principles of religion, and yet scarcely to be aware that, in neglecting to judge for themselves what is right, they have been chargeable with a culpable omission of duty. Others, who have been sensible of the importance of these inquiries, have been too deeply engaged in the affairs of the world, too impatient to improve in the arts of gain, or too busily occupied in the pursuit of pleasure or the routine of fashionable engagements, to find leisure for reading and reflection. Not a few imagine themselves too well instructed in the principles of religion to be capable

of receiving farther light, or are so well satisfied with the opinions which they have inherited from their ancestors, as to think all farther inquiry wholly unnecessary. Whilst, perhaps, there are some who are disheartened in this kind of inquiry, from an apprehension of insuperable difficulties, or who are in the situation of the Ethiopian nobleman, who in reply to Philip's inquiry, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" said, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" From these and other causes it is certain, that there is much ignorance respecting religious subjects even among those who nevertheless profess to be religious; and, perhaps, it may be asserted, that the progress of religious knowledge does not keep pace with that of the liberal sciences and elegant arts.

And yet who can doubt that this kind of knowledge is highly important? The subjects on which it is employed are certainly sublime in their nature, and infinitely

finitely interesting to man; and the necessity of rational principles, as the foundation of right conduct, must be evident to every one who attends to the nature of the human mind. That kind of religious knowledge which is the result of free inquiry, is the only ground that can be securely relied upon as the foundation of a consistent and virtuous character. It may be fairly admitted as a general maxim, that no truth can find its way to the heart that is not first perceived and acknowledged as such by the understanding. There may be instances in which accurate speculative opinions are united with a depraved and vicious character; but it is generally found, that just and enlarged views produce integrity and generosity of heart; or, in the language of Solomon, that "a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."

Allow me, then, my brethren, to exhort you, in the pursuit of religious knowledge to "go on towards perfection,"

and to offer you such hints of advice as may be of use in expediting your progress.

The first rule which I would lay down upon this subject is, impress your mind with a strong conviction that it is exceedingly desirable and important that you should make farther improvements in religious knowledge. Without this it will be impossible that you should persuade yourselves diligently to "apply your hearts to wisdom, and your ears to the words of understanding." Why do men of science and taste engage with ardour in their respective pursuits, but because they find them capable of affording an immediate gratification to their love of novelty, or some other natural feeling, or because they expect to reap some benefit, or gain some reputation, by increasing their knowledge or improving their taste? Why does a young man of spirit and discretion apply with indefatigable industry to the study and exercise

cise of the profession or occupation to which he has devoted his days, but because he is strongly impressed with an idea of the necessity of proficiency in the business he has undertaken, in order to secure his future credit and success? Were men equally sensible of the importance of religious knowledge, we should no longer find them indifferent to the means of instruction, public or private, which they enjoy. The holy scriptures, and other valuable writings on religious topics, would no longer be thrown by as wholly inadequate to the purpose of affording an agreeable and interesting employment for a leisure hour: those discourses which are adapted to inform their understandings would no longer be heard with languor and indifference; but they would hearken diligently to the voice of truth and wisdom wherever it speaks. Contemplate, then, my brethren, the nature of religious truth, or of those principles which respect your own

nature as moral agents and immortal beings, the perfections, providence, and government, of the Supreme Deity, and the history of his dispensations for the purpose of enlightening and reforming the world, till you have a lively perception of your personal interest in these subjects, and feel an earnest desire to know the truth concerning them. Convince yourselves, as you easily may, that it is impossible to believe to any good purpose without a rational conviction arising from a clear perception of sufficient evidence. Assure yourselves of the importance of free and diligent inquiry as the only way to acquire settled principles, and of the absolute necessity of settled principles, as the basis of a consistently virtuous character; and learn to value every addition to your stock of religious knowledge as a new acquisition of strength and stability to the foundation upon which the structure of your happiness is to be reared,

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Having thus prepared your mind for the undertaking, resolutely apply yourself to the task of inquiring, with all the accuracy in your power, into the grounds and principles of religion. Whatever violence you may be obliged to offer to your settled habits, whatever interruption it may be to your other favourite pursuits, or whatever difficulties the current of fashionable manners may cast in your way, set apart some stated seasons for this business, particularly some considerable portion of that day which is consecrated to religion. Spare neither labour nor expence to furnish yourself with the means of information, which in the present enlightened age you may easily obtain. Provide yourselves with those valuable helps for examining, in regular order, the grounds of natural and revealed religion, and for understanding the scriptures which the learned labours of eminent men have furnished, and use them with freedom and impartiality,

Enter upon every inquiry of this kind with an *independent spirit*, or a mind superior to the influence of human authority. The propensity of the multitude to take their religious creed upon trust, and to rely upon the authority of others, has always been in exact proportion to the prevalence of ignorance and barbarism. Where the vulgar are involved in intellectual darkness, they naturally look up with superstitious veneration to the distinguished few with whom they suppose the light of heavenly truth to dwell, and with resigned understandings receive the law from their lips. Easily persuaded that the mysteries of religion lie far beyond the reach of their understandings, they embrace the doctrine of their teachers without inquiry or hesitation as oracular declarations of divine truth. This weakness in human nature there have always been men who have had the sagacity to discover, and the artifice to improve to their own emolument. Hence restraints have,

have, at various times, been laid upon free inquiry, in which the ignorant and timid multitude have tamely acquiesced. In the body of christians to which we belong few difficulties, however, of this kind remain. It is the first principle of our profession, that in matters of religious faith and practice, no man, or body of men, can have a right to dictate to others. In conformity to this principle, pursue your inquiries, my brethren, without any implicit reliance upon human authority. Avail yourselves of the learning and wisdom of others in forming your opinions; but make no sacrifice of your judgment to fallible men. Give that degree of credit to the truth of their assertions, and the fairness of their representations, which you judge to be due to their probity and candour; diligently attend to the arguments by which their opinions are supported; but, after all, form an independent judgment for yourself. Since you profess to call no man
master

master upon earth, upon all occasions make a free use of your own understandings; and, according to the precept of Christ, "even of yourselves judge what is right."

A third rule which I would propose as of great importance, in order to your going on to perfection in religious knowledge, is this: Always inquire after truth with minds open to conviction. Having disengaged yourselves from the chains of authority, let your next concern be to free your minds from the bias of prejudice, that you may be disposed to embrace the truth wherever it is found, and to follow it wherever it may lead you. Whatever opinions you have embraced in consequence of deliberate inquiry and rational conviction, are to you *truths*; all your other opinions, even though they should happen to be true, not appearing to your understanding with the evidence of truth, are *prejudices*. In all your inquiries, you should then be careful to
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bring your *truths* with you, but to leave your *prejudices* behind you: that is, you should fairly compare the arguments which come before you upon any question, not with any hasty pre-conceptions or borrowed notions, but with such *first principles* as you have, upon the most mature consideration, taken as your guides; not scrupling sometimes to review even these, that you may be well assured that the structure of your opinions rests upon a firm foundation. If you have never hitherto given any question that comes before you a careful examination, consider any opinion which may arise in your mind concerning it as nothing better than an unsupported proposition, accidentally lodged in your memory, which, for aught that you know at present, may or may not be true. In short, be always ready to listen with candour to the reasonings of those who differ from you in opinion; to give your own tenets, wherever you see occasion, a careful

a careful re-examination; and, at last, to submit without hesitation to the authority of reason. This is the only way in which it is possible to make advances in knowledge, and go on towards perfection; After all, it is true, you will not attain the point at which you are aiming, the perfect knowledge of the truth; for in the present state, after our best endeavours, "we know but in part." The most industrious and successful inquirer may adopt the language of Solomon—"I said, I will be wise, but it is far from me." But you will have the satisfaction to reflect, that you have "given your heart to know wisdom;" and to hope, that hereafter that which is in part will be done away, and that which is perfect will come.

But it is time that I proceed to the second part of my design, and add a few words upon that important branch of christian profession—a virtuous temper and character,

Speculation, which hath not practical utility for its object, is of little value. This is true universally, and particularly in religion. Religious tenets are interesting, and merit attention, in exact proportion to the influence which they are adapted to have upon men's characters. Be above all things, then, concerned that your religious knowledge may furnish you with effectual motives to right conduct. Be wise, that ye may be good and happy: according to the maxim of our Saviour—"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

In order to assist you in going on towards perfection in goodness, I beg leave to offer you two cautions, which, in the present times, appear particularly necessary.

The first is, be careful not to place the perfection of the christian character in things foreign from its true nature. Many people judge of the degree of merit in any character by the frequency with which the services of religion are repeated, and the

the rigid exactness with which acts of voluntary abstinence and mortification are performed. They pronounce him the most perfect man, not who leads the most sober, righteous, and godly life, but who repeats the greatest number of prayers, or who most severely mortifies his body for the benefit of his soul. Others place christian perfection in an uncomfortable severity of manners, in abstinence from those amusements which are commonly deemed innocent, in a precise singularity of appearance and gloominess of countenance, and in a censorious contempt of every thing which has the appearance of fashion or pleasure. With persons of the former description the empty shadow of external observance is substituted in the room of the substantial virtues of a good life: with those of the latter, the virtuous habits and manners which constitute the excellence of human characters, and render them respectable, useful, and happy, are treated as low and ordinary attainments,

tainments, scarcely worth the attention of the pious christian; or, however, by no means to be brought into comparison with those voluntary mortifications and those mystical flights which merit no better an appellation than that of fanaticism. Such ideas of christian perfection are manifestly injurious to the interests of virtue, by leading men to direct their principal attention and zeal to objects either trifling or visionary, with the hazard of neglecting those things which alone are "good and profitable unto men." We cannot, therefore, be too cautious in admitting into our system of christian virtues any other qualities or attainments than those moral habits and actions which are included in "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God."

The second caution which the complexion of the times renders it particularly necessary that you should observe is, suffer not your ideas of moral obligation
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to be relaxed in conformity to the popular opinions and general practice of the world. The leading principles and maxims of virtue are not commonly disputed; but, in almost every particular branch of duty, men find means to excuse themselves from every thing burdensome, and to leave themselves full scope for the indulgence of their favourite inclinations. According to modern ideas of sobriety, integrity, sincerity, honesty, and benevolence, men can persuade themselves that they are sufficiently observant of the laws of moderation and temperance, whilst they indulge themselves, almost without restraint, in every species of luxurious enjoyment—that they are sufficiently upright and honest, whilst they make use of mean and injurious artifices to render trade productive of exorbitant profits—and that they are in their hearts disposed to the exercise of humanity, whilst, to gratify their avarice and ambition, they make no scruple of
engaging

engaging in plans of commerce which, in their first principle or in their unavoidable consequences, involve the misery and destruction of their fellow-creatures.

If we, my brethren, be desirous to "go on to perfection," we must not content ourselves with the false opinions and depraved taste of the multitude concerning the duty and happiness of man: we must aspire after that consistency and distinction of character which arise from just ideas of human nature, and settled principles of religion and virtue: we must be ambitious to excel in every attainment which can adorn our rational nature and our christian profession: we must suffer no prospect of pleasure, profit, or honour, to subdue our virtuous resolution, nor any habit of indolence or luxury to retard us in the prosecution of any laudable purpose. In the cultivation of our intellectual faculties, in the service of our brethren, in supporting the interests of religion, we must be inspired with a degree

306 *Advances towards Perfection, &c.*

of ardour and alacrity which will lead us to think nothing done whilst any thing yet remains to be done. Finally, whatever things are true, just, honourable, lovely, and of good report, we must think of these things and practise them. Not thinking ourselves to have yet attained, or to be already perfect, let us then leave the things which are behind, and press forwards to those which are before, for the prize of eternal life, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; which that we may all obtain, God of his infinite mercy grant! Amen!

The Goodness of God to the Poor.

PSALM lxviii. 10.

*Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness
for the poor.*

FROM the nature of man, and his condition in this world, it seems impossible, even under the best constituted society, that great inequalities in rank, and fortune, and outward circumstances, should not arise. Where property is secured by laws, the superior industry, ability, and good fortune of individuals, will enable them to accumulate more than an equal share of the general stock, and transmit

308 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

it to their posterity. Wealth thus acquired has a natural tendency to increase; and a proportional degree of power, influence, and respect, will ever accompany it. Thus, with the many advantages of regular and settled government, must always be joined the apparent evils attending great diversity of condition; and as some will be raised too high in the scale of prosperity, others will fall as much too low under the weight of adversity.

In every civilised country, hard indeed, and pitiable, seems the lot of a great portion of the community. Toiling to earn a scanty pittance by the sweat of their brows; broken and bowed down by hardship and fatigue; despised, insulted, oppressed, by those who are indebted to them for the superiority they enjoy; how shall the poor sustain the load of life? How shall they preserve themselves from sinking, heart-broken, to the grave? If they look up to charity,

it will, indeed, do something—and, thank God! *much*, especially in this age and country, has been done—to alleviate their sufferings: but still the unavoidable evils of poverty and wretchedness must recur; and many must be doomed to pine away in utter despair of all human succour. Far removed from the eye of compassion, and beyond the reach of the hand of bounty, often must decrepid old age and disease groan under the want of every necessary aid: often must the solitary widow and forsaken orphan look around, in vain, for bread and comfort.

Has, then, a just and merciful God provided them no consolation under their grievous lot? Has he left them no relief but sighs, and tears, and bitter complainings? By no means. Lamentable as their condition may appear, they need not despond, nor ought they to repine; for that great and good Being, who despiseth nothing that he hath made, is their protector and friend. “Thou, O God,

310 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor."

This consolatory doctrine will be fully established, when we have shewn, in the *first* place, that, with respect to the most essential ingredients of human happiness, the rich and poor are upon a level; *secondly*, that in some important particulars the poor have the advantage of the rich; and, *thirdly*, that they enjoy, in common with their richer brethren, the means of religion, and the blessed hope of immortality.

I may be allowed, in this discourse, to take for granted a truth which our Saviour expressly asserts, and of which we are all, I trust, fully convinced, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses;" that in determining whether any individual is happy, it is of much more importance to know what kind of man he is than how much he is worth. If this be admitted, it is easy to perceive that the path

path to happiness lies as open to the poor as to the rich. Virtue is a treasure which, as wealth cannot purchase, so neither can power monopolize. No one needs ask his neighbour's leave to fear God and practise righteousness; and he who, in these and all other respects, sincerely performs his duty, whatever be his outward condition, may assure himself that he is acceptable to that gracious Being who is no respecter of persons. A poor man may praise God as devoutly for his small portion of this world's goods as his richer neighbour who is "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day:" he may discover as much real merit in conscientiously and diligently discharging the duties of his humble station as another man in performing the more splendid offices of a higher sphere. Even with respect to the virtues of humanity and charity, the exercise of which may, at first view, be thought more peculiarly to belong to the rich, the poor

312 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

man is not without opportunities of practising them. If he cannot deal out his bread to the hungry and clothe the naked, he can make his family and friends around him happy by an uninterrupted course of kind attentions and faithful services; he can bestow seasonable counsels and faithful admonitions where they will be more useful than silver and gold; he can weep with them that weep; he can do what is still more meritorious, he can rejoice with them that rejoice. He who gives to misery all he has to bestow, if it be only a look of sympathy and a tear of pity; he who casts an eye—not of envy, but of cheerful complacency—upon the good fortune which he is not permitted to share, is a good man; and, whatever be his lot in life, must be happy in the consciousness of right intentions and generous affections. The little that a righteous man hath is heightened in its value by being accompanied with the satisfactions of innocence, and is, therefore,

fore, "better than the riches of many wicked."

A second proof of the goodness of God to the poor may be drawn from the moral advantage which, in several important particulars, they have over the rich.

The temptations to which the rich are exposed from that opulence which offers an easy gratification of every inordinate desire are so powerful and hard to be resisted, that, comparatively, few among them have been found who have been able to preserve themselves from gross violations of the laws of morality and religion. Pride, luxury, and intemperance, forgetfulness of God, and severity, oppression, and cruelty towards their brethren, are vices into which the poor are in less danger of falling than the rich and powerful. To this we must add, that they who are placed by Divine Providence in the higher ranks of life have duties to perform, as well as temptations to oppose, which do not fall to the share
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314 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

of the poor: for it is a great mistake to suppose that sobriety, in the use of the good things which are set before them, will of itself be sufficient to give the rich a title to the happiness of the future state. From those to whom many talents have been given a proportional increase will be demanded, before they will be acknowledged as good and faithful servants, worthy to enter into the joy of their Lord. He who has employed a large fortune solely or principally in aiming to increase his own gratifications, although he may have refrained from those excesses which are usually termed criminal, has yet no reason to expect, from his impartial Judge, any other doom than that pronounced in the parable upon him who in his life-time had his good things, which he was content to enjoy without liberally communicating them to his fellow-creatures. The rich man, who seriously meditates on the strict account he is one day to render for all the worldly advantages

advantages that have been bestowed upon him, must often tremble in the midst of his prosperity, and feel more depressed with a consciousness of the burdens, than elated with a sense of the privileges, of his envied condition. It may, therefore, be a just ground of consolation to the poor man, when he compares his condition with that of his superiors in rank and fortune, that, if he has fewer conveniences and indulgences than they, he has also fewer privileges and talents to be accountable for hereafter.

If it be said that the poor man also hath his peculiar temptations, it must be considered, that the same situation which may be supposed to incline him to ingratitude, discontent, and envy, or tempt him to acts of fraud and dishonesty, do at the same time afford him so much the better opportunity of rising to eminence in moral merit, by being contented with a little, cheerful in obscurity, and, in the midst of poverty, rich in good works :
and

and it cannot be doubted, that the inward satisfaction which at present attends a consciousness of having bravely struggled with adversity, and resolutely performed our duty in the midst of difficulties and discouragements, and the confidence in Divine protection which this consciousness inspires, will more than counterbalance the peculiar inconveniences and hardships of poverty.

But the poor man's best support under the burdens and hardships of his present condition must be drawn, in the third place, from the recollection of his christian privileges and heavenly hopes.

“To the poor the gospel is preached”—those glad tidings of eternal life which have been so graciously sent from Heaven to brighten the gloom of mortality, and cheer the heart of man with comforts which this world cannot bestow.

The manner in which christianity was first promulgated, and has since continued to be taught and propagated, was such as
better

better suited the circumstances of the poor and ignorant than that of any other institution with which the world has been acquainted. Jesus Christ did not, like most of the philosophers of antiquity, shut himself up in his school in order to communicate his doctrines only to a select body of his disciples, whilst the vulgar were held as profane persons, unworthy or incapable of being enlightened. On the contrary, he went about from place to place, mixing in all companies, attracting general attention by his miracles, and inviting men of all ranks and conditions to receive the great truths of religion, which he made known in language intelligible to the most unlearned. It was to the multitude that he addressed that sermon from the mount which contains so excellent a summary of christian morals. The streets, the public places of resort, and the open fields, were chosen by him for the communication of his instructions, that all might have free access
to

318 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

to him, and the poor might attend on equal terms with the rich. His disciples followed their Master's example, and zealously spread through various lands the knowledge of the gospel among all who were willing to receive it. Assemblies were soon formed for the sake of public worship and instruction, to which all were admitted on terms of perfect equality; the rich freely employing their wealth in supplying the temporal and spiritual necessities of their poor brethren. Thus, in process of time, was founded, what the world had never before seen, a regular plan of moral instruction and improvement for the whole community. It is the peculiar glory of christianity, that through every age, even in the midst of innumerable errors and corruptions, this truly beneficent design has been continued, and the warmest zeal has been shewn in securing to the poor the blessings of the gospel. Thus the declaration of the Divine Founder of our holy religion,

religion, that "the gospel is preached to the poor," has been made prophetic, and has constituted a peculiar and lasting character of his dispensation.

What on earth can be conceived of equal importance, or a greater proof of the goodness of God to the poor, than such a provision for the general instruction of mankind? The lower classes of society are of necessity excluded from the pursuits of science, and those literary attainments which are so much boasted by those who have taste and leisure for acquiring them. They cannot, with the astronomer, follow the motions of the planets, and gain a glimpse of that admirable harmony which the Almighty has established in his creation. They cannot search into the laws to which the elements are subjected, and understand the effects resulting from their combinations and reciprocal action. They must remain unacquainted with the nature and more curious properties of animals and vegetables,

vegetables, and can comprehend scarcely any thing of what passes within their own bodies. But with respect to the much nobler and more useful knowledge of the will of God as a rule for their conduct, of the means of acquiring the approbation of their Maker, and of attaining to the high rewards of a better world, they may become as fully informed as the wisest and most learned of their species: and, as we are assured that the degree of exaltation to which any one shall arrive in a future state shall be in proportion to his advancement in piety and virtue alone, and not to the progress he may have made in the knowledge and wisdom of this world, so we need not hesitate to pronounce, that poverty and meanness of condition will be no obstacle to the acquisition of the noblest rewards and highest honours that Heaven has in store for the good.

The truth is, that the gospel of Christ has pointed out a way to eternal salvation,

tion, open alike to the high and the low, to the rich and the poor. It prescribes a plain rule of life and manners which all may comprehend; and it promises to all, of every rank and station, who shall have passed their lives in conformity to this rule, the glorious recompence of a happy immortality. "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and piously, in this present world, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus." Christianity is a religion which in its essential doctrines, unmixed with the inventions of men, is intelligible to the meanest and most uncultivated understanding, and which speaks the language of divine consolation to every honest and well-disposed mind. It provides for every good man, however obscure his lot in this world may have been, an inheritance

322 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

in the world to come, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Can it, then, admit of a doubt, that "God hath prepared of his goodness for the poor!"

This doctrine affords important practical lessons both to the rich and to the poor.

The equal distribution of the most important blessings among men of all ranks should strongly remind the rich of the original equality of mankind. When they see that Divine Providence has furnished the poor as well as the rich with the means of religion, and provided them with the hope of eternal life, so that with respect to the infinitely momentous concerns of their future existence "there is no respect of persons;" this should at once mortify in their bosoms all haughtiness and pride on account of their present advantages, and banish from their hearts all scorn and contempt of those who with them are partakers of immortality.

ality. "Pride," it is said, "was not made for man;" and certainly it should not be exercised towards fellow-men. It is astonishing that this equalising spirit of the christian religion has had so little influence upon many who have called themselves zealous christians. How is it possible that a frail, weak creature, acknowledging that all its best hopes are fixed upon another world, should, on account of the little distinctions of this transitory state resulting from birth, rank, and fortune—which commonly, too, imply no personal merit in the possessor—look down upon a fellow-creature, an heir to the same high expectations with himself, as upon a being of an inferior nature, whom it is the utmost condescension to treat with common civility? Nothing, surely, but strong prejudices of education, and the unfeelingness too frequently attendant upon prosperity, could dictate sentiments so inconsistent at once with good-sense and religion. How

much better would it become the rich to imitate the divine condescension by defending the rights of the poor, and even consulting their ease and comfort? The necessary inconveniences of their inferior and dependant state it is the duty of the rich as much as possible to alleviate by kind attentions, and, whenever it is necessary, by liberal benefactions. Above all, it is their duty—and they ought to consider it as one of the most sacred duties of humanity—to provide liberally for their moral and religious instruction, that they may suffer no want of those spiritual treasures which alone can recompense them for the smallness of their share in earthly goods. It is true, as I have before observed, that the constitution of the christian church has already provided for the regular supply of public religious instruction. But we know that, in many cases, either through the negligence or bad education of the poor, or from other accidental circumstances, great numbers

numbers are, in fact, very little benefited by this provision. Here the interference of those to whom they look up as their superiors may be of great use, both by setting proper examples before them, and by adding external motives, or extraordinary helps, to lead them in the way of instruction and duty. To the rising generation, especially, much good may be done in this manner; and in every view, both of private charity and public utility, the religious education of the lower classes is an object which claims the warmest attention from persons in superior situations.

With respect to the poor themselves, the smallest reflection upon the goodness of God towards them, especially in the provision which he has made for their everlasting welfare, ought to awaken in them a lively sense of gratitude to their Almighty Benefactor. What greater proof could he have given them of his condescending mercy than in sending his

326 *The Goodness of God to the Poor.*

son Jesus Christ into the world to teach them their duty, and to comfort them with the hope of immortality? What concern can they have in life equal to the care of preparing themselves to become partakers of the joys so liberally set before them?

But it is of the highest consequence to them not to forget, in the prospect of these joys, the conditions on which alone they are to be obtained. It would be a fatal mistake in them to suppose, that merely because they are in a low and afflicted condition in this world, they shall be proportionally exalted in another. Heaven is not to be gained as an exchange for any thing on earth; for what is there earthly that can be put into the balance against it? Glory, honour, and immortality, are promised to those only, whether rich or poor, who pass their lives in a patient continuance in well doing. Duties there are which every one, in every rank, owes to his God, his fellow-creatures,

creatures, and himself, without a strict and diligent performance of which it is in vain to expect to become an inhabitant of that holy place into which nothing wicked or impure shall ever enter. The duties of the poor are indeed less complicated than those of the rich. A great part of their time is necessarily taken up in procuring themselves subsistence; and if they labour peaceably and industriously in their vocations, the public has, perhaps, few other positive demands upon them. But in the several capacities of servants, dependents, husbands and wives, parents and children, they have many private duties to fulfil, upon the right discharge of which a great part of their own happiness, and of the happiness of those with whom they are immediately connected, depends: and with respect to their Maker, all the sentiments of gratitude, confidence, submission, and obedience, are as justly due from them as from the rest of his rational creatures.

328 *The Goodness of God to the Poor:*

They owe him, in particular, the warmest thankfulness for his inestimable gift of the gospel of Christ, and are bound to the most serious attention to the preaching of his word, which is "able to make them wise unto salvation."

Happy, then, if they can form a proper judgment of their happiness, are the poor, who, by humble resignation to the will of their Creator, and a faithful performance of the simple duties of their station, may assuredly look forwards to the glorious prize of eternal life promised to all good men in the gospel. These promises let them ever regard as their great, their only possession: let them bind them about their hearts, and hold them fast, as their best cordial and support in all times of affliction. Fortified with these, there is nothing so calamitous in the whole catalogue of human miseries but that it may be patiently and manfully endured. Under the accumulated pressure of scorn, and want, and disease,
when

The Goodness of God to the Poor. 329

when all earthly comforts vanish from their sight, and no prospect is left of better days in this world, the glorious hope of immortality will sustain their fainting spirits, and almost take from them the sense of present evils. Thus supported, how should they droop? thus encouraged, how should they be dismayed? God is their friend and patron—eternal happiness is in their view—and how should they despond?

It is this consideration, and this alone, which can reconcile us to those striking inequalities among mankind, with respect to worldly advantages, which have at all times been the occasion of much doubt and repining. These inequalities, indeed, are of less weight in the scale of real happiness than might at first appear: for certain it is, that the true enjoyment of life is by no means in proportion to the rank and wealth of individuals; and it is in every one's power, by a right conduct, to avoid many of the evils which cause much

330 *The Goodness of God to the Poor:*

much of the unhappiness of this world. Farther, such is the kind influence of habit, that many hardships cease to give us pain when we are accustomed to them. Still, however, extreme indigence and bodily pain must ever be severe evils; and present wretchedness must, from these causes, be the portion of numbers in the lower classes of mankind. But if their miserable condition give them a single advantage over the prosperous in the pursuit of everlasting felicity, the account is more than balanced; for what are the vain pomps and flattering pleasures of this transitory stage of our existence, compared with those endless joys which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive? Only regard man as a being destined for immortality, and worldly pains and pleasures, prosperity, and adversity, sink into nothing, and become as the dream of yesterday. That we
may

The Goodness of God to the Poor. 331

may all learn rightly to estimate the comparative worth of things temporal and things eternal, may God of his great mercy grant! Amen!

Universal Obedience necessary to Salvation.

JAMES ii. 10.

*Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet
offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

It was one of the doctrines of the ancient Stoics, that all vices are equal in criminality, and consequently are equally deserving of punishment. There is a degree of refinement and severity in this notion which very well suited the character of the sect to which it belonged. But one does not expect to find any such rigorous doctrine in the simple and mild institution

institution of christianity; and yet, at first view, the maxim of the text may seem to imply, if not the precise notion of the Stoics, something nearly resembling it, and at least equally harsh and severe. For what, it may be said, can be more unreasonable than that the man who transgresses in one particular should be considered and treated as if he were guilty in all others? Or how can it be supposed, consistently with our fundamental notions of the moral perfections and government of God, that he will punish the man who offends in one point only as if he offended in all? The passage, it must be acknowledged, has its difficulties; and, in order to affix to it a meaning consistent with the first principles of religion, and with the general tenor of the New Testament, it must be understood with some qualification. But, then, let it be remembered, that this is a liberty which must necessarily be allowed, with respect to many general maxims

maxims of morality or prudence, which are nevertheless universally received as containing much truth and wisdom—a liberty, indeed, without which all moral writings would be perpetually liable to misconstruction and perversion.

In the first place, it seems very evident, that by *offending*, the apostle must mean *offending wilfully*; and that it could not be his intention to include within the import of the maxim those occasional errors of conduct into which the best of men sometimes fall through inadvertence or surprise without any evil design, and concerning which it may be truly said, that “in many things we all offend.” It may also be reasonably presumed, that by *offending in one point* is not meant a casual breach of duty in a single instance, but an habitual violation of some one divine command, a continued course of transgression in some particular respect. And further, when it is said that he who offends in one point is *guilty of all*, it would

would be contrary to all our ideas of equity to understand the expression as denoting, that by being habitually guilty of one sin, a man renders his condition as wretched as if he violated every law of morality and religion. All that can be reasonably understood by the general maxim of the text then is, that the man who lives in the habitual practice of any sin, will as certainly expose himself to punishment as the man who is guilty of every kind of vice: and thus much may be asserted in perfect consistency with the natural principles of equity, and with the doctrine of christianity.

If we consider the laws of God with respect to the authority by which it is enjoined, it is evident that it is as truly contemned by the man who habitually offends in one point as by him who offends in all. It is the same sovereign power which prescribes the law which is violated as that which is observed: whatever, therefore, be the transgression, it

it implies a disavowal of subjection to the authority of God, and a tacit denial of his right to govern us. The whole of the divine law is one connected system; so that the violation of any precept may properly be considered as the violation of the law of God, in the same manner as wounding a particular limb is wounding the body. Virtue, considered as a disposition of the mind, is one uniform principle of doing what is right; and if we can be at liberty to do what is wrong in any one instance, no reason can be assigned why we should not have the same liberty in every other. Whatever be the general ground or principle upon which the divine laws are founded, it is evident that it must be in all cases equally valid; and that, upon the supposition of an indulgence in favour of any single offence, the end of the divine government could never be effected. Let it be supposed, for example, that if intemperance were connived at in one man, dishonesty,

honesty, for the same reason, might be overlooked in another, profaneness in a third, and so on through the whole circle of vices; and thus it is evident the whole force of the law would be destroyed, and "the commandment of God be of none effect."

If, in the next place, we consider the law of God with respect to those who are subject to it, wherever obedience to these laws is not universal, without any exception in favour of particular sins, it is not sincere. A true principle of religion must operate with equal force with respect to all the laws of God. If this principle be not sufficiently strong to preserve a man from transgressing with respect to some one branch of duty, there is good reason to conclude that, in any other case, a temptation equally powerful would be able to seduce him into guilt. Whence it may be justly apprehended, that in those instances in which he does perform his duty, it is more from motives

of present interest or vanity than from a true fear of God or love of virtue. The true reason why men who live in the practice of some vices are free from others is, that their temptations are stronger in one case than the other. Had their virtue met with the same trials in those cases in which it has been preserved as in those in which it has been violated, it would probably have failed. Had the virtues they have practised been attended with as much difficulty, and required as much resolution, as those which they have neglected, it may be reasonably presumed that they would have had no virtues at all to boast of. It is an observation of one of the ancients—"If you confess that you are destitute of any one virtue, you in effect acknowledge that you are possessed of none*."

If this be more than can be strictly maintained, thus much at least may be

* Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* L. ii. § 13.

with truth asserted, that the man who habitually allows himself in the practice of any vice, discovers himself to be void of that genuine principle of goodness which is necessary to qualify him for future happiness, and to entitle him to the future reward promised to good men in the gospel of Christ. He that lives in the violation of any one of the divine laws, as effectually excludes himself from the happiness of heaven as he who breaks every law, and may therefore be said to be guilty of all. To which we must add, that he who wilfully and habitually transgresses any one of the divine laws, will as *certainly* be sentenced to future punishment as if he had transgressed them all: for his habitual guilt classes him among those evil-doers against whom the scriptures denounce tribulation and anguish. Not that the partial offender shall be *equally* punished with him who has abandoned himself without restraint to every kind of wickedness. Different degrees

of suffering will, doubtless, be hereafter inflicted upon offenders in proportion to their degrees of criminality. Whilst "some shall be beaten with many stripes," others shall be "beaten with few." But no habitual and impenitent offender whatever must expect entirely to "escape the righteous judgment of God."

That the doctrine which I have now explained and established is that which the apostle James meant to teach in the words of the text, will be evident to any one who will consider the connexion in which the words are introduced. The Jews at that time entertained an opinion that some of the divine laws were of more value than the rest, and that the exact observance of the law in some particulars would be sufficient for their salvation, though in other respects they were highly culpable. In order to refute this notion, the apostle in the text taught his brethren, that no impenitent offender, even though he offended in one point only,

only, could either obtain reward or escape punishment hereafter. The connexion in which the words are introduced is this—"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all: for he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." The probable meaning of the passage may be thus expressed—"If you obey the law of "loving your neighbour as yourselves," (which being one of the two commands on which our Master has declared all the law and the prophets to depend, may be called a royal or sovereign law) you act well. But if you

discover that partiality towards the rich which I have before censured, you violate this law, and must expect to be punished. You have, I know, been taught, that he who observes one great precept of the law, though he violate the rest, may be saved: but this is, a dangerous mistake; for the habitual and impenitent transgressor of any single law of God as truly deprives himself of the reward of obedience, and exposes himself to punishment for disobedience, as if he had transgressed in every point; since the same authority which prohibits adultery, also prohibits murder. The law of the gospel is, indeed, a law of liberty: but do not imagine that the liberty which it bestows consists in an indulgence to practise any vice; believe it rather to be a dispensation of moral liberty, intended to set you entirely free from the bondage of sin; and let all your words and actions agree with this notion of the christian law."

The result of what has been advanced

is,

is, that no man can securely promise himself a share in the felicities of a future state, or an exemption from future punishment, who indulges himself in the practice of any vice, or, in other words, who wilfully and habitually violates any of the laws of God. This rule is universal, without a single exception in favour of any particular vice which any individual may, from natural propensity, or from accidental circumstances, be under peculiar temptations to commit. Whatever difficulty may attend the struggle, it must be resolutely maintained; for it is only by refraining from the sin which "easily besets him," that any man can manifest the sincerity of his religious principle, or yield to his Maker that obedience which is necessary to his salvation.

Nor let it be thought unreasonable, that obedience to *all* the laws of God should be made the indispensable condition of our acceptance with him. For

let it be considered, this is no more than is constantly expected among men, as the only proof of sincerity in friendship, or of fidelity in servitude. If one who made the most liberal professions of attachment to you were, nevertheless, to express his regard to you by such actions only as, while-profitable to you, were also advantageous to himself, and were to neglect and forsake you as soon as his professed attachment required any sacrifice of interest or vanity, would you not renounce such friendship with disdain? If a servant were in all respects to behave well, except one in which his service was of essential importance to your interest, would you think his general good conduct a sufficient atonement for this particular defect? And can it be imagined, that the Almighty will accept of such partial friendship or service as would be rejected with indignation between man and man? Can it be supposed that God "will be satisfied with our observance
of

of those laws which we have no temptation to transgress, and overlook our disobedience in that *only* point where we *can* show the sincerity of our religious principle, where our passions and our present interests interfere with our duty?"

If our obedience might be allowed to fail in that very point in which its sincerity is chiefly put to the test—if peculiar strength of temptation were to be admitted as a plea for indulgence—what evidence could possibly be given of a genuine love of virtue, or how could the interests of virtue be secured in the world? Every man has some one propensity towards vice which he finds more difficult to subdue than any other. To grant him indulgence in this particular would be to allow him all the scope for wickedness he desires; and since men's criminal propensities are exceedingly various, the allowance of one favourite vice to each individual would be, in fact, granting a general licence to sin, and annihilating

nihilating the whole force and authority of the divine laws.

Every one's self-partiality inclines him to think his own faults small, and to hope that, at least in one favourite vice, he may be indulged without much injury to others, or much hazard to himself. But is the fault, on account of which he is thus inclined to plead for exemption, a real sin, and as such forbidden by the law of God? If so, what good reason can be assigned for granting it indulgence which may not with equal propriety be urged in favour of any other sin? You wish to be indulged in intemperance, because it is grateful to your appetite. Why not in dishonesty, because it is profitable? Why not in revenge, because it is sweet? Why not in licentiousness, because it is pleasant? On this plea, every vice may, in its turn, claim privilege; every man may be set free from all the sacred bonds of morality, and the world may become

one universal scene of depravity and corruption.

But will no allowance be made for human infirmity? Where the natural propensity to any particular fault is violent, where the temptation to any sin is frequent and powerful, is no indulgence to be expected from a merciful God? Certainly that gracious Being who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, and who pitieth those who fear him as a father pitieth his children," will make all favourable allowances for unavoidable infirmities, and will overlook and forgive all offences, however heinous or habitual, which are at length sincerely repented of and forsaken. But let us not mistake occasional regret or remorse for sincere repentance, or feeble wishes, and faint and ineffectual efforts towards amendment, for real reformation: nor let us flatter ourselves, as long as any criminal affection remains unsubdued, or any vicious habit remains unreformed, that we
have

have a claim to indulgence for involuntary errors, or occasional failures. Merciful allowance for defects is only to be expected with respect to those faults which we daily watch against and strive to correct: and, if we do this in good earnest, we shall certainly gain such advantage over our constitutional or habitual infirmities as to give us a delightful consciousness of continually advancing in goodness. But merely to wish, now and then, that we were better, to lament our want of resolution, and to make occasional attempts at amendment, in which we do not persevere, is not to do what might reasonably be expected from us, and what, if we were sincerely resolved to reform, we certainly should do: and no one has any right to expect that God, any more than man, will accept of ineffectual purposes instead of good actions.

On the whole, the reasonableness and wisdom of the general maxim of the text is sufficiently manifest; and, consequently,

ly, the necessity of universal obedience to the laws of God, without a single exception in behalf of any favourite vice.

*¹¹ Who does not now see, that to recede one tittle from the true meaning of this declaration is to open a door for the admission of every imaginable iniquity? When once we begin to question the necessity of *universal obedience*—when once we begin to make laws for ourselves, and to determine peremptorily that *this* virtue is illiberal, and *that* impracticable; that *this* vice is a pardonable frailty, and *that* a necessary accomplishment—it is easy to perceive that there must soon be an end of all distinction between right and wrong. If one man, for instance, thinks that dishonesty is, in certain circumstances and on certain occasions, allowable, why may not another claim the like indulgence for licentiousness, or revenge, and rank *them* also in the number

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of fashionable and reputable vices? There is, in fact, hardly a crime in nature which has not somewhere or other a patron and defender: and thus, if every man, instead of forsaking his own particular sins, is to have an exemption granted him from every restraint which he happens to think inconvenient, the precepts of religion will be neglected, one by one, till at length not a single duty will be left which may not be evaded when we think fit."

"So dangerous is it to allow the smallest latitude in the requisitions of religion, and to lower in any degree the tone of its precepts, in order to accommodate them to the corrupt casuistry of worldly wisdom. Men may fancy, if they will, that superior education or superior rank sets them free from what they are apt to regard as the *vulgar restraints* of strict morality; they may fancy, that what is vice in a low station, by ascending into a superior region, leaves its dregs behind, and is refined into a virtue; that dissimu-

lation,

lation, though a base coin, is a necessary one; and that the grossest irregularities, when they help to embellish manners, are not vices of the heart, but youthful follies, which are sure to meet with indulgence here, and impunity hereafter." The idle fancies of man cannot, however, alter the nature of things. Whatever may be imagined to the contrary, vice of every kind, and in every class of mankind, is disgraceful, injurious, destructive. The law of God will not bend to the humours, or accommodate itself to the convenience, of men; and it is an immutable and eternal truth, that wickedness shall not go unpunished. No human being is so far exalted above his fellows as to have a licence to sin: nor is there one law for the poor, and another for the rich; one for the small, and another for the great. "Every one of us must give account of himself to God, and receive according to his deeds, whether they have been good or evil." Vice, wherever it is found,

found, will be treated as such by the righteous Judge of the world; and it is impossible to compound with him for the violation of some of his laws by the observance of the rest. Then alone can we hope to stand before our Maker and not be ashamed, when we have respect to *all* his commandments. Let us, then, form a deliberate and determined purpose to forsake all our evil ways, even our most favourite vices, and to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, yielding an impartial and unreserved obedience to his whole will; that, being purified from sin, our fruit may be unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

The

The true Ground of Justification.

ROMANS viii. 34.

It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?

COULD we be always assured, in particular cases, what actions God will justify, or declare to be just and right, and what actions God will condemn, the censures of men ought to have little influence on our opinion, and none at all upon our conduct: for whatever God justifies must be in itself right, and worthy of universal approbation; whatever he condemns must be wrong, deserving of censure, and pro-

354 *The true Ground of Justification.*

ductive of evil. The maxim implied in the text, that the judgment of men is of no value when placed against the judgment of God, is so nearly self-evident as not to need a formal proof. But the application of this maxim to particular instances of moral conduct, either in the judgment which a man forms of his own character, or in the sentence which he pronounces upon the characters of his brethren, requires much deliberation; for the most ignorant and superstitious have often made use of this as a plea to justify the most egregious folly and the most enormous vices. The immoral rites of ancient paganism, and even the horrid practice of offering human sacrifices to idols, were sanctified by the pretext, that they had been instituted by the authority, and were conformable to the will, of the gods: and, even among christians, many idle ceremonies have been practised, a narrow and cruel spirit of intolerance has been cherished, and all the horrors

horrors of persecution have been consecrated, under the notion of pleasing God and doing him service. Perhaps the truth is, that scarcely any maxim has been more frequently misapplied to encourage men in vice than that which is urged by the apostle as a powerful motive to engage his christian brethren, in the midst of obloquy and reproach, to persevere in well-doing—"It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

It may, at first view, seem reasonable to assert, that in order to be certain that our actions are approved by God, we need only obtain a favourable report from our own consciences; and that there can be no exception whatever to the general rule, that the man whose heart does not condemn him, has a right to confidence towards God. But, if this were universally true, the apostle Paul was to be justified, before his conversion to christianity, in persecuting the christians; for he declares that, at that time, he verily

356 *The true Ground of Justification.*

thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. By the same appeal to conscience, the most sanguinary measures, in support of what is called the true faith, might be vindicated; and the Inquisition itself might be converted into the Temple of Virtue. If the zealot, who persecutes his brother for heresy, has once persuaded himself that it is his duty, he may, upon this ground, treat with contempt the reasonings of philosophy, and even bid defiance to the authoritative voice of nature. But thus to make the ultimate appeal, in doubtful questions of moral casuistry, to the judgment of the individual, with respect to whom the question is to be determined, would be to allow every man to set up his own conscience as the will of God— it would be to substitute the private understanding and feelings of one man, however misguided by prejudice, biassed by selfishness, or enslaved by superstition, in

in the room of that general sense of mankind by which every species of moral conduct is viewed in every possible light, and brought to the test of public utility and general interest.

It may, perhaps, assist us in obtaining a clearer view of the subject, if we consider that there are three tests to which all our actions ought to be brought: the sentence of our own minds, or what is commonly called conscience; the opinion and judgment of mankind; and the moral law of God, whether declared in the established order of the moral world, or written in the holy scriptures. Let us endeavour to ascertain the distinct province and use of each.

The immediate office of conscience evidently is, to accuse a man to himself of personal guilt, by charging him with some evil intention; or to acquit him to his own heart where he knows himself to be free from any such evil design: still, however, leaving him capable of forming

358 *The true Ground of Justification.*

a wrong judgment concerning his own temper and character, and therefore exposed to self-delusion.

The moral sense of mankind, or their common judgment concerning moral actions, being less liable to prejudice and partiality, serves to correct the errors of private conscience; to illuminate it, where it mistakes through ignorance; to set it right where it determines wrong through partiality; to awaken it when it slumbers through indolence; in fine, to pronounce with greater certainty upon any individual action, whether it be relatively virtuous or vicious, just or unjust, productive of happiness or misery. This common judgment of mankind in morals has the same office in improving the private sense of what is right or wrong as the general understanding has in correcting or improving the understanding of an individual as to what is true or false. And in offences committed against the common judgment, and the common interests
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of mankind, it is perfectly reasonable to refuse the plea of private conscience as a ground of acquittal from civil punishment. For all acts of injustice are certainly in themselves criminal, as an invasion of the common rights of men, whether it be perceived by the individual who commits it or not. The intention to commit any action in itself unjust, certainly renders the offender blamable, and liable to punishment, on account of the injury he has done to society, whatever erroneous opinion he himself may entertain concerning the action, since this error might and ought to have been corrected. The public judgment is then, in these cases, superior to that of individuals.

But because it may happen that the public judgment on moral subjects may be very erroneous, or may be corrupted by the general prevalence of criminal passions, a necessity arises for some third standard with which the two former may be compared, and to which an appeal

360 *The true Ground of Justification.*

may be made from both. And this can be no other than the law of the Creator, to be read in the order of nature which he has established, or in the written records of christianity. This declaration of the divine will, or the written law of God, is intended to enlighten the minds of the ignorant, to awaken and revive the power of conscience in the vicious and depraved, and at the same time to furnish sanctions which may operate powerfully upon men's hopes and fears to engage them to refrain from whatever it has pronounced to be sinful; thus supplying the defects of that private conscience which is often feeble in its operations, erroneous in its decisions, or ineffectual through the predominancy of evil habits. The written law of God, moreover, furnishes general rules and maxims of moral conduct, which, in concurrence with the universal law written on the heart of man, tend to keep civil institutions within the limits of moral obligation. And as the plea of
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private conscience cannot justify that social conduct which militates against the moral understanding of the public, so neither can the corrupted moral judgment of the public justify that conduct which is condemned by the law of God. If it be true, on the one side, that human laws, or the laws of society, laid down for securing and establishing the common rights of men, can never admit that private conscience should be pleaded in arrest of judgment; it is equally true, on the other, that the unjust laws of men, resulting from a corrupted public sense, cannot be admitted as an excuse for the breach of the positive laws of God, instituted for the benefit of his rational creatures, and the protection of all the subjects of his moral government. The common opinion of mankind; could it be fairly collected, can only declare what men judge to be true or false, right or wrong, but cannot make it to be so. The private virtue, or personal wisdom, of those who
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362 *The true Ground of Justification.*

make laws, depends upon their virtuous intentions, and the degree of knowledge which they possess. It may happen that institutions thus formed by common consent may militate against some of those universal principles from which God hath instructed us that all our actions ought to proceed. And wherever this is the case, such laws, though they may operate powerfully on the fears of men, and produce obedience from a regard to public authority, will nevertheless have an unfavourable influence on their moral feelings, and religious principles, by habituating them to obey man rather than God.

The result of what hath been hitherto advanced is, that in judging of moral conduct an appeal lies from the private conscience of every individual to the general sense of mankind, and from this general sense of mankind to the *divine law*, in whatever manner it has been promulgated.

If it be asked, Where is that divine law

law to be found which possesses an authority superior both to that of conscience of each individual, and that of the general judgment of mankind? The answer is, it is to be found in those moral precepts which have been published to the world at sundry times, and in divers manners, in the name and under the authority of God; and particularly in those lessons of piety, righteousness, charity, and universal goodness, which are preserved in the christian records. Besides all the external evidences of a divine original, which attend the christian revelation, considered as a code of moral law, it bears upon it the stamp of divinity in the reasonableness, equity, and wisdom of its precepts; in the illustrious model of excellence with which they are accompanied, and in the solemn sanctions by which they are enforced. The christian law recommends itself to our attention — commands our obedience by its wonderful simplicity, by the universal extent, yet perfect consistency,

364 *The true Ground of Justification.*

ency, of its requisitions, and by the rational and exalted views which it gives of the Supreme Being, and of the condition and expectations of man. So pure, so refined, so sublime, is the spirit of the christian law, that its natural tendency is to enlighten the understandings, to purge the passions, to elevate the sentiments, and to improve the characters of men.

To evince the superior excellence and divine authority of the christian law, we need only turn our attention, for a moment, to those two general rules which lay a firm foundation for the exercise of sincere piety, and the practice of all social virtue. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth:" and "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The former of these rules, in proportion as it is practically regarded, at once annihilates all those hypocritical forms of religion which are only observed out of respect to the

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the opinions of men, or for the sake of making a gain of godliness; it at once lays the axe to the root of all superstition and idolatry, and exposes the weakness and absurdity of all such religious institutions as are not immediately adapted to cherish genuine piety in the mind of the worshipper. It at once casts such light upon the nature of devotion, a subject with respect to which men had long been wandering in the mazes of error, as to leave no room to doubt that it consists in worshipping God from a firm belief of his being and providence; with a high veneration of his perfections, with a grateful sense of his benefits, and with an earnest desire of obtaining his approbation. Of the reasonableness and propriety of this rule, its vast extent, and its powerful influence in establishing rational and consistent piety, every one must be convinced. Nor is it less evident that the general rule of doing as we would be done unto, is indisputably just in its nature, and universal

366 *The true Ground of Justification.*

versal in its extent ; furnishing men with a clue to guide them through all the mazes of passion and self-interest in their treatment of each other, and enabling conscience to act the part of an equitable judge in its decisions concerning our own conduct in our respective social capacities. So extensive is the power of these two principles in religion and morals, that, like universal axioms in science, they admit of an easy application to innumerable particular cases. They are of power sufficient to correct all those errors, and subdue all those prejudices, in religion and morals, which the ill-informed conscience of individuals, or the imperfect judgment of the public, had been unable to remove.

Thus fully are we justified in making the last appeal to the divine law as it is declared in the gospel of Christ, in the judgment we form of our own characters ; and we may confidently assure ourselves that if our conduct be conformable at once to the dictates of our conscience, to

the general sense of what is right among mankind, and to the rules and precepts of christianity, we have nothing to fear from the censures of men, but every thing to hope from the favour and approbation of God. We may boldly say, with the apostle in the text, "It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

In judging of ourselves we have, as I have said, three *guides*; and we should be careful to employ each in assisting us to form a right judgment, and guard against any false conclusions which might arise from following any one of these guides exclusively of the rest. We should guard against that *self-conceit* which might lead us to oppose our own sense of right and wrong to the general sense of mankind, and even to take it for granted that God must approve what our conscience, unenlightened and undirected by his law, does not condemn. We should guard against that implicit deference to public opinion which might lead us to make it the
standard

368 *The true Ground of Justification.*

standard of our conduct even in cases where it contradicts the natural dictates of justice and humanity, and the precepts of religion. And lastly, we should guard against that presumptuous confidence in our own construction of the precepts or maxims of christianity, or that blind appeal to mere words without regard to their true meaning, which might lead us to mistake that for the written law of God which contradicts the voice of nature, and that universal sense of right and wrong which is the eternal and immutable law engraven upon the human heart. Before we can, with propriety, adopt the apostle's language, "It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?" we must appeal to three credible witnesses, and form our judgment concerning our own characters by their united and consistent verdict. We must consult conscience to pronounce whether we have acted according, or contrary to, conviction, and consequently whether we are
guilty innocent

innocent or guilty in intention. And that conscience may make a faithful and true report, we should encourage its sensibility, and beware of wounding it by repeated neglect of its warnings, or of destroying it by inveterate habits of vice. At the same time we should be cautious not to consider it as an omniscient or infallible guide. As well might a man suppose that his natural understanding can intuitively, and without study, discover all truth, as that his natural conscience can of itself, without cultivation, in all cases accurately discern between right and wrong. In the next place, if we wish to be assured that we are not only intentionally, but actually, virtuous, we must compare the decisions of our own moral sense with the general judgment of mankind on moral actions. Other men, it is true, cannot read our hearts, and are therefore incompetent judges of our *intentions*; but actions, with their consequences, are visible to every eye: and so-

370 *The true Ground of Justification.*

ciety has so much interest in detecting and condemning invasions of public or private rights, and in general discovers such a quick sense of injury, that its judgment certainly deserves much attention in the estimate we make of our own characters with respect to the social virtues. Lastly, that we may be preserved both from self-delusion and from paying so much regard to the public opinion concerning morals as to follow a multitude to do evil, we must call in the testimony of the law of God, and inquire whether the verdict which our own conscience gives in attestation of our innocence, and the approbation of our fellow-creatures, be confirmed by the habitual conformity of our dispositions and actions to the precepts of virtue and religion laid down in the scriptures. We must examine our hearts, and review our lives, to determine whether we have sufficient ground to make the Psalmist's appeal to heaven: "I have inclined my heart to perform

perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end: I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word."

Happy the man whose mind never reproaches him with the guilt of evil intentions! Happy the man whose conduct accords with the general sense of mankind in concurrence with his own judgment and conscience! But still happier he, because less liable to mistake, whose spirit accords with the spirit of christianity, and whose actions will bear to be tried by the rule of life which Christ hath given us! Such a man may bid defiance to the reproaches and censures of men, and triumphantly assume the language of the apostle: "It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"

Considering the general agreement which there is between the laws of God and the moral sense of mankind, one might suppose in theory that there could be little danger that the man whom God justifies should be condemned by the

372 *The true Ground of Justification.*

world. In this respect, however, as well as many others, men's misapprehensions, prejudices, and passions, too often get the better of their reason, and prompt them to judge unrighteous judgment. This was the case with respect to the first christians, whose exemplary purity, benevolence, and piety, were not sufficient to guard them against the reproaches of malignant tongues. And still, alas! it frequently happens that the wicked speak "grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous." Perhaps the reason is, that conscious of possessing little merit, and of deserving little praise themselves, they are jealous of the increasing reputation of others more worthy of approbation than they; and cannot bear to see men possibly much their inferiors in rank and accomplishments, carrying away the palm of public applause. Perhaps it is that they are envious of that tranquil happiness which virtue enjoys in every station, of that domestic peace and comfort

comfort which is the reward of virtuous affections ; of that pure friendship which is the child of benevolence ; of that voluntary respect which unaffected goodness commonly commands ; and of that powerful influence which is the natural fruit of distinguished merit. Perhaps it is that they are mortified and hurt when they compare their own condition and their own feelings with those of the eminently wise and good, and are determined to take a poor revenge upon those who have gone so far beyond them in merit and enjoyment, by doing all in their power to tarnish the dazzling lustre of their reputation. At enmity with that divine law which knows no distinctions among men but those which virtue creates ; which admits of no exercise of power but that which is consistent with justice and humanity ; which ordains that he who would be the greatest of all should be the servant of all ; they behold with a jealous and indignant eye those who are deter-

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374 *The true Ground of Justification.*

mined, at all events, to adhere to such principles with a firm and unyielding spirit, who cannot be tempted by any bribe to adopt a more pliant and convenient system of morals; they seize every occasion of misrepresenting their principles, ridiculing their singularities, and aspersing their characters. According to the invidious and slanderous representations of such men, a strict and conscientious adherence to principle is affected preciseness; a sincere attention to religious duties is either weak enthusiasm, or odious hypocrisy; a meek and forbearing spirit is contemptible pusillanimity; humane or patriotic exertions are the ostentatious parade of vanity; zeal is bigotry; candour is indifference; and, in a word, every appearance of goodness a fair disguise to conceal sinister views and base designs. Thus are good deeds evil spoken of, and good men condemned, by an ignorant, prejudiced, and corrupt world. But it is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?

demneth? In the midst of obloquy and reproach let the righteous man still triumph in his integrity; and looking forward to the day when his righteousness shall be brought forth as the light, and his just doings as the noon-day, let him say, "It is a small thing for me to be judged of man's judgment: he that judgeth me is the Lord."

The Wisdom of *suffering* rather than *sinning*.

1 PET. iii. 14.

*If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy
are ye.*

It is a great consolation to a good mind to observe, that the general constitution of the world is favourable to virtue ; and that there is, on the whole, sufficient reason to conclude, from the established course of things, that the Supreme Director of the universe is “ a righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness.” We commonly find, from experience, that a steady adherence to the principles of honour

nour and integrity in our connexions with each other, is the way to establish our reputation, and secure our prosperity, and that a regular observance of the rules of temperance in the government of ourselves, is the sure means of preserving our health and tranquillity. It may, therefore, be admitted as a general truth, confirmed by facts, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace: and no man can have sufficient reason to doubt whether the world is under the direction of a wise, righteous, and good being, or whether it be, on the whole, his wisdom and interest steadily to adhere to the practice of religion.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that the Almighty hath seen fit, in some cases, to leave the righteous exposed to peculiar difficulties and hardships. In a world where great multitudes are misled by false opinions, and are the slaves of corrupt passions, it is impossible that it should not happen that good men should occasionally

occasionally suffer inconveniences, and sometimes even grievous tribulations, in consequence of their strict adherence to truth and goodness. The history of past ages furnishes innumerable instances of men, whose rational principles, and virtuous characters, have so powerfully opposed the superstitions and vices of the multitude, as to create them adversaries, and subject them to persecution. This was the case particularly with respect to the first race of christians. The doctrines which the great founder of their religion taught, and the rules and maxims of conduct which he prescribed, were inconsistent with the prevailing opinions and manners of the Jews, who were superstitiously exact in their observance of ceremonial institutions, but grossly defective in their regard to the important duties of morality. A violent opposition might, therefore, naturally be expected against the father of this new sect, and against those who should have the courage and virtue

virtue to follow him. Of this our Saviour was himself sufficiently aware, and freely apprized his disciples. "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross, and follow me." Accordingly, during his ministry he met with much injurious treatment, and at last fell a sacrifice to the prejudices and passions of those whom he had lived to instruct and reform. Many of his followers shared the same fate. Whilst they were employed in propagating the most rational, useful, and divine institution of religion which was ever established, and promoting the cause of truth and righteousness, both Jews and Gentiles, through a superstitious attachment to their established tenets and customs, or through a criminal disinclination to submit to the authority of the pure and holy doctrine of Christ, inflicted upon them various hardships and sufferings, and, in many instances, persecuted them even to death. And although in consequence of the irresistible energy

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energy of divine truth which accompanied the doctrine of Christ, the number of believers continually increased, they still remained exposed to the weapons of persecution, and in various ways suffered for righteousness' sake.

In the succeeding ages of the christian church these sufferings have been continued. When the heathen persecutions ceased, christians became persecutors of one another. The numerous sects into which they were divided scarcely agreed in any one point except the necessity of extirpating heresy. This intolerant principle regulated the conduct of each sect towards the rest, and produced mutual enmity, violence, and cruelty. Those who had the honesty and the courage to adhere to their principles, even though they might happen to contradict the system protected and enforced by the civil power; whom neither terrors could fright, nor allurements seduce, from the path of their duty, endured much tribulation

lation, and; in many cases, fell a sacrifice to what they judged to be the cause of truth and righteousness. By the church of Rome especially, thousands of excellent men—of whom the world was not worthy—have been crushed under the iron hand of persecution.

And although this persecuting spirit, which for so many ages harassed the christian church, is, at length, in a great measure subsided, so that even the inquisition itself has lost its terrors—although there are at present few countries in which it is thought necessary, either for the spiritual benefit of the christian church, or for the support of civil government, to subject men to imprisonment, torture, and death, merely on account of speculative opinions, or religious practices; yet still it is true concerning those who will live godly in Christ Jesus, if not that they must, at least that they are liable, to suffer persecution. If any individual, out
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of a sincere regard to the cause of truth and virtue, and from a generous desire of promoting the happiness of mankind, boldly opposes popular errors and superstitions, and industriously propagates such religious principles as he judges most consonant to reason and revelation, and most favourable to the practice of virtue, it is not improbable that his integrity and public spirit may create him many adversaries. Instead of meeting with that candid attention which every one who endeavours to serve the public, by correcting pernicious prejudices, or suggesting useful improvements, has a right to expect, he will probably find that the ignorant vulgar of all ranks will be offended at the introduction of strange doctrines, which neither they nor their fathers have been accustomed to hear: that many of their cautious friends will censure their rashness; that only a discerning few will approve their zeal and public spirit, and that
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of these only a very small number will afford him their public countenance and support. By such difficulties as these have many real friends to truth been disheartened from prosecuting laudable designs for the instruction and improvement of mankind: and it has been owing to the superior zeal and resolution of a few excellent spirits, that these discouragements have not prevented all religious improvements.

But, independently of these extraordinary trials to which the active friends of religious freedom are still exposed, there are hazards and sufferings to which every one who determines, at all events, to practise his whole duty in the midst of general depravity, must always be liable. A man of inflexible honesty, who carries his integrity with him into every transaction of life without suffering himself to be turned, though ever so little, out of the right path, must frequently expose himself to the ridicule of those who have adopted

adopted more pliable and convenient principles, and must be in danger of losing the friendship and support of those who cannot persuade themselves to pursue a plan of conduct so unfavourable to their worldly views and projects. A man of strict sobriety, who never suffers himself to be enticed by appetite, good-fellowship, or a slavish respect to custom, into any kind of intemperance or debauchery, must not expect to escape the smile of ridicule, and the sneer of contempt. Unspotted purity, incorruptible honesty, and undefiled religion, to those who are incapable, for want of a mind well instructed, of discerning the value of these qualities, or who make their own depraved hearts the standard by which they judge of the characters of others, will appear nothing better than ridiculous singularity, or contemptible preciseness. Or, if such persons feel a secret conviction of the superior merit of those characters which they affect to despise, envy and malice will prompt

prompt them to endeavour, by base misrepresentations or vile calumnies, to bring them down in the public estimation to a level with their own. From these and other similar causes it must unavoidably happen, even in times the most favourable to virtue, that the best of men should suffer even for well doing.

When, in any one of these ways, we are called by divine Providence to suffer for righteousness' sake, what is the conduct which reason, virtue, religion, require from us? Will they permit us to act the part of the coward, and basely fly from danger? Shall the fear of reproach, contempt, or suffering, lead us to resign the peaceful reflections of our own minds, the honourable testimony of the wise and good, and the approbation of our Maker? To escape undeserved ridicule or neglect, worldly disappointments, or even bonds, imprisonment, and death, shall we do that which would render ourselves contemptible in our own eyes, and deprive us

of our immortal hopes? God forbid! If we deserve the name of good christians, or honest men, we shall be ready to part with every thing else rather than our integrity, and shall be ready, at all times, to choose affliction rather than sin. We shall do what we judge to be right at all times, and in all circumstances: we shall stand firm and unshaken in the post of duty when the darts of ridicule and calumny are levelled from every quarter against us; even amidst the terrors of persecution we shall remain unalterably determined to adhere to conscience and to God, saying, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto me, that I may finish my course with joy. Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live."

Who does not perceive, in such conduct as this, something truly great and excellent? A good man never appears

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so worthy of respect and veneration as when he stands collected and serene in the midst of his enemies, and leaning on the firm base of his integrity, says, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what men can do unto me." Thus patiently and bravely to endure persecution for righteousness sake, discovers a mind firmly settled in the best principles, and richly stored with the noblest sentiments. It indicates a sublimity of virtue, which rises far above all sordid views of gain; subdues all effeminate desires of indulgence, and annihilates every timid apprehension of danger. It supposes a man possessed of a firm persuasion that there is a reward for the righteous; that there is a God who judgeth in the earth; a cheerful confidence in the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence, and a steadfast belief that all things will, in the issue, work together for good. It indicates a lively sense of the importance and excellence of virtue, and an ardent desire

to promote its interests in the world. In fine, such a conduct manifests a soul superior to the little concerns of the present life, and elevated above this world, by the belief and expectation of a future state, where virtue will receive its complete and everlasting recompence.

It is impossible that a mind thus ennobled by the principles of religion, and supported by the hope of immortality, should be wretched in any condition. If its troubles abound, its consolations will still more abound. It is one of the peculiar rewards which at present attend those who suffer for righteousness' sake, that they possess the fullest evidence of their sincerity. In a season of tranquillity, when external circumstances are favourable to the profession and practice of religion, it may not, perhaps, always be easy to ascertain the reality of our religious principles, and determine whether we are induced to act well from a genuine love of virtue, or from less worthy motives,

motives. But if our virtue will stand the test of ridicule and persecution, we may safely conclude it to be sincere. If when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon the house, it stands secure, we may be assured that it is founded upon a rock.

The good man will, moreover, in this situation, have the satisfaction to find his virtues continually improving. Awakened from that lethargy which uninterrupted prosperity naturally creates, released from the enfeebling enchantment of luxury, he feels his noblest faculties alive for every manly exertion. Wherever God and duty call he is ready to follow. He is not afraid of evil tidings, for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Committing himself to the protection of the Almighty Guardian of the righteous, he bids defiance to danger, and exults in the thought that he is "counted worthy to suffer for righteousness' sake." Whilst his enemies are endeavouring to rob him of

his integrity, he grasps it with a firmer hold than ever, as his best treasure. Amidst the sufferings which he endures in behalf of virtue and religion, he feels himself a noble advocate for the most glorious cause: he sees all good men equally interested with himself in the success of this cause, and assures himself that every honest heart will glow with admiration of his fortitude, and that his name will be mentioned with honour by distant posterity. At the same time he looks beyond the surrounding crowd of applauding spectators, to the eye of that Righteous Judge from whom he hopes to receive the final plaudit—"Well done, good and faithful servant." Nor shall his hope in God be deceived: for the Messenger of heavenly truth has said, "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven: blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for

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for my sake : rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

It was thus that the first christians fortified their minds against the reproaches and sufferings which they were called to endure in the public profession and zealous propagation of the christian faith. It has been under the influence of the same principles, and through the inspiration of the same hopes, that the noble army of martyrs, whose hardy endurance of poverty, confinement, torture, and death, has immortalized their names, have "resisted unto blood, striving against sin." And think not, fellow-christians, that ye have no farther concern with these illustrious examples of fortitude than barely to admire them. Smithfield fires, it is true, have been long ago extinguished, and are almost forgotten. It is now scarce-

ly remembered—or only occasionally mentioned as a singular fact—that good men were formerly burned alive at a stake for their religious opinions. The places where these unnatural barbarities were committed are sometimes shown as objects of curiosity; and perhaps the recollection of the shocking scene chills the spectator with a momentary horror: but he blesses God that the bloody days of persecution are over, and rejoices that they are never likely to return. And, though the caprice of human passions, and the uncertainty of human affairs, forbid us to pronounce, with absolute certainty, that those religious persecutions which have for so many ages disgraced the christian church, may not, in some future period of returning ignorance and bigotry, be revived, the present general diffusion of knowledge through all countries, and all ranks of men, affords us a tolerable security against this dreadful calamity. But do not too hastily take it for granted, that,
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because you may not be likely to be imprisoned, or to die for religion, you are in no danger of suffering for righteousness' sake, and therefore can have no opportunity of exercising the virtue of christian fortitude, or obtaining the honours and rewards annexed to this virtue. I have already remarked that strict honesty and exemplary sobriety are at all times liable to suffer from the ridicule and contempt of the unprincipled and profligate, and from the malice and spite of those who find their iniquitous designs obstructed by the unyielding spirit of christian integrity. I must add, too, that in the present state of society it will frequently happen that an irreconcilable interference will arise between the obligations of religion, and the prevailing customs of the world—between inclination and duty—between worldly interest and the hope of future happiness. It is, in many cases, impossible to conform to the example of the multitude around us, and yield submission to
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the mighty tyrant fashion, without incurring some degree of guilt. It is not in the power of the most subtle casuistry to reconcile every opposite claim of avarice and religion, and teach a man how he may, at the same time, serve God and mammon. The man, therefore, who is determined, at all events, to follow the dictates of his conscience, must expect to meet with mortifications—must sometimes lose opportunities of present gain—must deny himself some present indulgences—must submit to be sometimes ridiculed and despised for weak singularity, and even to be condemned for perverseness and obstinacy—that is, he must suffer for righteousness' sake.

You esteem yourselves happy in being born in an age in which you are exempted from those severe trials of your virtue which your ancestors experienced. But unless you possess those principles which carried them triumphantly through their severe

severe sufferings, you are not prepared for the condition you think so much more eligible than theirs. If you were seriously asked whether you could go through the persecutions which they suffered with equal fortitude, the question might possibly startle you, and instead of ransacking your heart for a true answer, you would perhaps only thank God that you are not likely to be put to the trial. But, my brethren, it requires the same faith in God, the same love of goodness, the same desire and hope of immortality, which animated the breasts of the martyrs, to carry a man safely through the temptations of the world, and enable him to support the character of a consistent and exemplary christian, in times of peace and tranquillity. Be not then too ready to flatter yourselves that, in the present state of the world, you can, without difficulty or trouble, obtain the glorious prize of immortality. If you wish to find your-
selves

selves hereafter upon a level with those excellent men who "through much tribulation have entered into the kingdom of heaven," you must be inspired with at least some portion of their spirit. If religious and christian principles required from them, in their situation, the trying sacrifice of personal ease, fortune, liberty, and even life itself, the same principles certainly require from us the much easier sacrifice of every passion and pursuit which would interfere with our duty, at a time when we may, for the most part, assure ourselves that "if we obey, and serve God, we shall spend our days in prosperity, and our years in pleasures." Did they think the crown of eternal life so rich a prize as to be cheaply purchased at the expence of every thing that was dear to them in this world, and shall we hesitate, for a single moment, whether we shall put ourselves in possession of the same glorious prize, when the only condition

dition required from us is "a patient continuance in well-doing? Shake off, fellow-christians, shake off, I beseech you, that lethargic and effeminate spirit which is the too common effect of an uninterrupted course of ease and prosperity. Suffer not the native vigour of your souls to be so enfeebled by frivolous amusements, or luxurious pleasures, or the noble ardour which your christian faith is calculated to inspire, to be so depressed by the chilling damps of a worldly spirit, as to become incapable of running, with resolute perseverance, the race set before you. If at any time you feel yourselves inclined to loiter in your course, or are disposed to think it hard that you are obliged, in order to secure your future happiness, to resign a few transient deceitful pleasures, to relinquish the flattering prospects of wealth and greatness which lie before you in the path of dishonesty, or to subject yourself to unmerited obloquy from those
who

who are incapable of entering into your conceptions and motives; gird up the loins of your mind by contemplating the great examples of those who have suffered more than you can ever suffer for righteousness' sake. Read the interesting story of that illustrious ancient, the virtuous Socrates, who without the divine supports of christian faith drank the poisonous cup of hemlock rather than desert the post of duty, assigned him by the Supreme Power. Review the long catalogue of christian worthies who, from the first martyr St. Stephen to the present day, have chosen rather to meet death clothed in the terrors of persecution, than to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscienc. Lastly, and above all, look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, whom the Jews, with wicked hands, crucified and slew; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, and despised the shame; and

and who hath herein given us an example that we should follow his steps; and assure yourselves that “if ye suffer with him on earth, ye shall also reign with him in heaven.”

Christians,

Christians, Sons of God.

I JOHN iii. 2, 3.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

ALL mankind are the rational offspring of God, are formed by his hand, and bear his image. They may, therefore, with the strictest propriety, be styled his children; and there is not a more natural, just,

just, or pleasing light, in which we can consider the Almighty, than as the Father of all men. Those, however, who enjoy the distinguished blessings of the gospel, are in a more especial and particular manner entitled to the character of sons of God. In the language of scripture all those whom God brings into a state of peculiar honour and advantage, and distinguishes by extraordinary blessings, are his sons. Thus Christ was called the Son of God as being appointed to be the instrument of conveying the most important blessings to mankind, and to be the Saviour of the world. And all his disciples, who are delivered from ignorance and vice, and brought into a state of light and moral freedom by his gospel, are said to be the children of God. This is the relation and character of christians in general, as they are a society of men, professing their faith in Christ, and enjoying the privileges of his gospel, the promise of the remission of sins, and the hope

of everlasting life. They are all the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. But though mankind in general, considered as the rational offspring of God, may justly be styled his children; and though christians, as a select body, enjoying peculiar privileges under the government of Christ, are the sons of God, yet those only are so, in the most strict and perfect sense, who act agreeably to their heavenly extraction and christian privileges, by the steady practice of virtue, and an uniform obedience to the will of God. Those who walk worthy of the vocation with which they are called, who in proportion to their advantages abound in all the fruits of righteousness, who faithfully obey the commands, and carefully imitate the example, of their divine master, and who are a peculiar people zealous of good works; are indeed the sons of God, the children of the Most High. Their behaviour is suitable to their high original, their distinguished honours, and their heavenly hopes.

hopes. They are the peculiar charge of divine Providence in this life, and they will be finally acknowledged and received as the children of God, and dwell in his heavenly kingdom for ever. Behold, fellow-christians, what manner of love our heavenly Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called in this distinguished and exalted sense, the sons of God. Contemplate with admiration and joy the unspeakable condescension and kindness of the ever blessed God, the maker and possessor of heaven and earth, who cannot be profited by us or any of our services; in adopting us as, in a peculiar sense, his sons, taking us into his family, and making us heirs of eternal life. At the same time let it not be forgotten that the relation in which we stand to God as his sons, requires on our part love, obedience, and confidence. Whom ought we to love if not our kind and merciful Father in heaven, who is himself infinitely amiable and excellent, and who is the foun-

tain of all our powers, enjoyments, and hopes? Whose friendship should we seek if not that of the Being on whom we depend for our existence and happiness, and whose favour is better than life? Whose commands should we obey if not those of that wise and gracious Being who rules us, not with the severity of a tyrant, but with the gentleness and tenderness of a parent. "If we have fathers of our flesh to whom we give reverence, ought we not much rather to be in subjection to the Father of spirits?" May he not justly say unto us, "If I be a father, where is mine honour?" Ought we not likewise to put a constant and cheerful trust in him who continually watches over us with the affection of a parent, and who employs his almighty power and unerring wisdom to secure the happiness of his children? Let us likewise remember, that if we are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus, we ought to look upon one another as brethren, and

and to behave towards each other as becomes children of the same father. We are brethren not only as we are partakers of the same nature, and capable of the same noble pursuits and sublime enjoyments, and as we have one God and Father in whom we live, and move, and have our being; but we are brethren more especially as we are united in one body, of which Christ is the head, as we have one Lord, one baptism, one faith, and one hope. It is, therefore, our duty to live as brethren. There should be a community of interests amongst us, and it should be the sincere desire and endeavour of each individual to promote the peace and happiness of the whole. Avoiding all contention and malice, all anger and evil speaking, we should exercise mutual condescension and courtesy, forbearance and forgiveness, kindness and charity, we should be kindly affectioned one towards another, in honour preferring one another, and should provoke one another

unto love and good works. This is the true spirit of the gospel, and the proper temper of brethren. Members of the same family, children of the same father, ought to have love one towards another.

The text instructs us further "that our present christian privileges are to be considered as earnest of greater happiness in a future state, though we are at present in a great measure unacquainted with the nature of that happiness." "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. We are, indeed, at present as it were in a state of infancy; we are not yet arrived at the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, have not yet reached the age in which we are to be put into the possession of our eternal inheritance. We are not, therefore, capable of judging what our Father designs for us, or to what dignities and honours he intends to raise us in the future world. But that we are now received and acknowledged as the sons of God

is a proof that we shall be treated as such hereafter; and our present privileges and honours are an earnest of still greater things in reversion. We are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We are encouraged to hope for this from the analogy of nature. As the several parts and members of the human body in its infant state lead us to infer its future mode of being, and to conclude that it is made for action and enjoyment; so our present constitution and situation, as rational and intelligent beings, our capacity of acquiring the most useful knowledge, pursuing the most enlarged and extensive inquiries, and enjoying the noblest moral and religious pleasures, give us ground to entertain the pleasing imagination that our being is not confined to this short and precarious life, and to hope for a future state of greater perfection and happiness beyond the grave. The evident distinction which is made in our favour in re-

spect to our intellectual and moral capacities, furnish us with a strong presumptive argument for a future life, in which our powers may expand to their utmost extent, and in which we shall enjoy all the happiness of which our nature is capable. "Behold, now are we the sons of God;" and we may surely delight ourselves with the hope that our wise and bountiful Parent, who has no interest to serve but that of his family and children, will provide for us a happiness suited to the nature which he has given us; that, having made us capable of the pursuits and enjoyments of rational beings, he will not put an end to our expectations and our being at death. Since he has made nothing in vain, we will not suppose that all the noble and excellent powers with which he endued us, were given us only for the purposes of this life, we will entertain the pleasing idea that he designs us for a more exalted and perfect state of being than the present.

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This life hath all the appearance of a state of minority or childhood ; we here receive instruction and improvement by slow degrees. We make gradual advances in knowledge and goodness, and are continually rising nearer to perfection. Our virtue meets with frequent trials, and by constant exercise becomes more refined and complete. We continually experience the uncertainty and vanity of all the enjoyments and possessions of this world, and are hereby directed to fix our thoughts and expectations upon a future state, and to set our affections on things above, not on things below. In a word, we now see but in part, and know but in part, and enjoy but in part ; but we may hope that we shall hereafter see clearly, know perfectly, and enjoy completely ; that that which is in part will be done away, and that which is perfect will come. It was the great design of our Saviour to confirm this glorious and delightful hope, and to prepare us for the enjoyment

enjoyment of future and everlasting happiness. He hath taught his disciples that it is his Father's good pleasure to give them a kingdom; that in his Father's house are many mansions; that he will hereafter come again to receive them to himself, that where he is they may be also; and that he loves them, and will give unto them eternal life. The gospel contains exceeding great and precious promises of happiness in a future life; and, to exalt our ideas of this happiness, describes it under the image of those things which are most esteemed and valued among them; such as unfading possessions, incorruptible riches, a crown of glory. By this means it furnishes us with the most powerful motive to a resolute and steadfast perseverance in well-doing, and affords us the noblest consolation and support under all the troubles of life, and the fears of death. But after all, the happiness which is reserved for us in a future state cannot be fully known and understood by us

us at present. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

We know at present that we are the sons of God, that we enjoy many invaluable blessings as his children, and that we are made partakers of the privileges of the gospel, and the hopes of everlasting life. But what that happiness is which is in reserve for us in the kingdom of heaven hath not yet been discovered to us. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." The possessions and enjoyments which are laid up for us in the heavenly world, lie at present concealed behind the veil of futurity. We know not all the happiness which is included in serving God, in being for ever with one another, and with the Lord. We know not what it is to join in the services and employments, and to partake of the felicities of angels, and of just men made perfect. We know not
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in what manner we shall hereafter exist, or by what means we shall receive the everlasting communications of happiness from God, the fountain of life. When we think and speak concerning a future state we are in great danger of indulging ourselves in childish imaginations, and chimerical conjectures. We ought, therefore, to enter upon these inquiries with humility and diffidence, and to express ourselves with caution and modesty. But it is far from being necessary, because we cannot form a complete and adequate idea of a future state, that we should lay aside the thoughts of it, as a thing absolutely beyond our reach, and improper to be made the subject of our meditations. Our conceptions of it must, indeed, at best be very imperfect, but even these imperfect conceptions may be of important advantage to us, to animate us in the performance of the duties, and to enable us to support the troubles, of the present life. The holy scriptures furnish us with several

veral pleasing representations of a future life under images borrowed from earthly things; and they sometimes describe it to us in more plain and express terms, without the assistance of allusion and allegory. Of this latter kind is the description in the text, "We know that we shall be like God, for we shall see him as he is." We are here instructed (in the first place) that our future happiness will, in a great measure, consist in the more perfect sight and knowledge of God. We now see the Almighty but as it were through a glass darkly. Our acquaintance with the works of nature, and with the laws of divine government, is so defective, that we can form but very faint and inadequate ideas concerning the Maker and Lord of all. Not only the general system of nature, but even the smallest parts of it which lie most obvious to our senses, have mysteries in them which we cannot unfold. All the discoveries which the utmost strength of human genius, and the

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most persevering and successful applications have made concerning the laws and constitution of the natural world, have only served to open to us new fields of inquiry, and to convince us that at present we are but children in understanding. If we consider the government of the world in a moral light, we find ourselves surrounded with still greater difficulties. We see sufficient proofs of the wisdom and the goodness of the first Cause, to lead us to conclude that on the whole the universe is under a wise and glorious administration; but how the general happiness is produced, by what means partial evil produces universal good, these things are at present past our finding out. We are no more capable of understanding the plan of providence, than an insect on the wall of a royal palace is capable of comprehending either the beauty of the edifice without, or the counsels of state which are concerting within. And if our conceptions concerning the works of nature,
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and the order of Providence, be so imperfect; how little can we know concerning him who ruleth over all. When we strive to raise our thoughts beyond nature to the great God of nature, to the contemplation of an infinite, eternal, self-existent being, we are lost in admiration, and feel that such knowledge is too wonderful for us, it is high, we cannot attain unto it: and so, indeed, it must always be; for limited faculties can never fully comprehend infinity. We shall never be able to find out the Almighty to perfection. To the most perfect and exalted finite minds he must always be, in some respects, the unknown God. But we are encouraged to hope that in a future state we shall have more just, exalted, and adequate conceptions of him. We shall not, then, as is too frequently the case at present, entertain false and unworthy apprehensions concerning his attributes and government, and, beholding him through the medium of our own prejudices and passions, see

him

him as he is not, but we shall be freed from all error and mistake, and shall see him as he is. And as our knowledge of God will be free from error, so it will be continually improving and becoming more extensive. We shall then become more fully acquainted with the works of God. We shall have an opportunity of surveying a much greater variety of objects; of examining more minutely and accurately into their natures and properties, and of discerning more completely the order and connexion which is established in the universe. One grand and beautiful scene will rise to our view after another; and they will all unite to exalt our conceptions of the great God of nature, and to lead us to say, with pleasure and admiration at present unknown, "Oh! Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all." We may, likewise, hope hereafter to be admitted to a more perfect acquaintance with the nature and design of the divine government; to see all those clouds

clouds which at present darken the divine designs removed, and to have a fuller conviction that all things are directed by perfect wisdom and goodness, and that the only reason why the conduct of the Almighty now appears so mysterious to us is, that we know but in part. We now only see the first act of the great drama of nature, and are therefore perplexed when we attempt to explain the design, and are sometimes ready to pronounce it defective and faulty. But when all the parts of it shall be unfolded, and we shall see the concluding scene, we shall, doubtless, be fully convinced that the whole scheme has been conducted with the greatest regularity, and executed with the most perfect skill. What the Almighty does we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. This gradual improvement in our acquaintance with the works of God, and the designs of his government, will doubtless continually increase our knowledge of his nature, and enable us to form more

just and exalted conceptions concerning him. And from this perfect knowledge of God another part of our happiness will naturally flow, namely, that we shall be continually improving in our resemblance of him. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." It will be impossible to contemplate the divine excellencies, as they will then be manifested to us in the works of nature, and the dispensations of Providence, without being changed into the same image. Whilst we admire and love the character of the Supreme Father of all, we shall be naturally disposed to imitate him. More especially the contemplation of the divine goodness, and the abundant experience we shall then have of it, will form us to the most perfect temper of benevolence, and lead us to be good and merciful according to our nature, and the station in which we shall then be placed, as our Father in heaven is merciful. How pleasing, how delightful, my christian brethren, is this idea of future happiness!

happiness ! How greatly are we indebted to the goodness of God in having made us capable of these felicities, and in having sent his son Jesus Christ into the world to call us to this blessed hope ! How careful ought we to be to prepare for this unspeakable and everlasting happiness in the presence of God, by acquiring a resemblance to him in our dispositions and manners whilst we are on earth. Every one that hath this hope in him, saith the apostle John, purifieth himself even as he is pure. The man in whom the hope of a future life is a living and active principle, who sets his affections on things above, and lays up treasures in heaven, will by a natural consequence become, in a great measure, indifferent to the uncertain and perishable enjoyments of the present life. The reason why we see so many who profess themselves the disciples of Christ, and declare their belief in a future state, acting inconsistently with their profession, giving themselves up entirely to

the pursuit of sensible objects, and sacrificing their eternal hopes to gratify their sensual appetites, their ambition, their pride, or their covetousness, is because they do not suffer the principles they have embraced to impress their hearts, and influence their behaviour. The pleasures, honours, and possessions of this world, they pursue as real, but those of heaven they treat as visionary, and scarcely worthy of their attention. But the man who firmly believes in a future state, and is duly influenced by the hope of it, will be superior to the allurements of vice, and will not be in danger of being led astray by the inordinate love of riches, honours, or pleasures, those three grand enemies to the purity and happiness of mankind, which the apostle John styles "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." The man whose hopes are fixed upon the pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore, will never resign them for the pleasures of sin, which
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are but for a season. He who lives in the expectation of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the kingdom of God, will not resign the prospect to obtain the most distinguished honours which this world can bestow. He who hath treasures in heaven, and enjoys the blessed hope of an inheritance incorruptible, &c. will not give up his title to these future and eternal possessions, to make himself master of all the wealth which the earth can afford; he will only wish to enjoy that portion of the good things of this life which he can enjoy without resigning his integrity, and relinquishing his claim to eternal life. By the power of his faith he will overcome the world, and will repel every temptation by saying, "What will it profit me if I gain the whole world and lose my soul?"

Since the hope of everlasting life hath so powerful a tendency to purify the heart, and to render us like to God; since every one who firmly believes in a world

to come, and makes this faith the great principle of his actions, abstains from every sin, overcomes every temptation, and daily improves in every moral excellence, we may hence, my christian brethren, form a judgment concerning ourselves, whether our hope of eternal life be sincere and steadfast, and such as will not make us ashamed. If our expectation of a future existence be so deeply rooted in our hearts as to be like good seed in good ground, and to bring forth fruits of holiness in our lives; if it leads us to mortify every corrupt affection, to exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man, and to persevere in well-doing; we may then rest satisfied, that our hope of heaven is rational and sincere, and that our title to the blessings of immortality is secured. But if our belief in a future state be only a speculative opinion, which rests in the understanding, without making its way to the heart, or an hereditary notion, which

which we have imbibed from our parents and teachers ; if it leaves us licentious, covetous, and immoral, and fails to purify our minds, and improve our manners ; it is the hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish.

Let us all, then, make that improvement of our christian privileges and hopes which is pointed out in the text. Since we are called to be the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and encouraged to expect that we shall hereafter be like God, and shall see him as he is, let us now purify ourselves even as he is pure ; having this promise, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. As he who hath called us to this blessed hope is holy, let us be holy in all manner of conversation.

The Laws of Religion not burdensome.

MICAH vi. 3.

*O my people, what have I done unto thee,
and wherein have I wearied thee? testify
against me.*

It has been a common practice among unprincipled and licentious men to speak of the path of virtue as rugged, and to censure the laws of religion as burdensome. Having, by long established habits of vice contracted a settled disinclination to submit to the restrictions of sobriety and honesty; and having, by a continued

course

course of criminal indulgence, so far depraved their taste as to be incapable of relishing the pure pleasures of innocence, they hastily pronounce those restraints which religion would put upon their appetites and desires an insupportable grievance.

But whatever those who have never experienced the satisfaction and delight which attend a consciousness of uniformly doing that which is right may imagine to the contrary, it will be found upon the most diligent and impartial examination that there is nothing grievous or unreasonable in any of the precepts of religion. We may conceive the Almighty as calling upon the advocates for impiety and licentiousness to produce their strongest objections against his government, and saying unto them in the words of the text, "What have I done unto you, and wherein have I wearied you? testify against me."

Will any one be hardy enough to assert
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that the authority under which religion professes to prescribe her laws has no real existence? Will any one say either that the Great Being who created and governs the world has no right to institute laws for his rational creatures, or that he is incompetent to the office of Supreme and Universal Lawgiver, or that he has, in fact, made no declaration of his will to mankind? Where should sovereign dominion be lodged if not in the hands of Omnipotence? He who gave to every other being its faculties and its very existence, and assigned it the station which it holds in the universe, must have a natural right, as well as power, to govern him. If there be in nature any bond which is indissoluble, it is that between the Creator and his creatures: if there be any authority which is irresistible and immutable, it must be that which the Lord of nature exercises over the works of his hands.

Nor can any one who reflects with the least degree of attention upon the idea

which reason instructs us to form of the attributes and character of the Supreme Being, entertain the smallest doubt concerning his ability to institute laws for the government of every part of his creation. We see that the material world is upheld in being, and preserved in perfect order, by the constant energy of certain powers originally impressed upon it by its great Former, and constantly acting according to established laws. And can it be questioned whether the wisdom which fixed the sun in his station, which guides the stars in their courses, and which produces in visible nature uninterrupted harmony amidst endless variety, be qualified to prescribe rules which shall produce order, perfection, and happiness, among his rational offspring? Nor, lastly, can it be urged that the Almighty has not, in fact, exercised this kind of dominion over the human race, but has left them at large to follow the impulses of appetite and passion without controul. Who will presume;

sume, in defiance of express testimony, of experience, and of feeling, to maintain that man is the only being in the universe who is sent forth by his Maker into the field of existence without a guide to direct his steps, without a ruler to controul his actions? Whilst inanimate nature universally obeys the laws of mechanic force, and the animal world yields implicit obedience to the law of instinct, shall man, the first and noblest work of God upon earth, be subject to no restraint, find himself under the controul of no law? The supposition were absurd. And no man needs go farther than to his own bosom to be convinced that it is contradicted by fact. The principle by which every one distinguishes actions and character, and pronounces one to be right and another wrong, is unquestionably a law written upon our hearts by our great Creator for the direction of our conduct. In enduing us with reason and reflection, by which we are enabled to deliberate upon

the tendencies of our actions, and to judge what is likely, on the whole, to be beneficial or otherwise to ourselves or others, our Maker hath clearly shewn it to be his will, that we should pursue that course which, after deliberate consideration, appears to be the wisest and best. Of the real existence of these moral principles and powers, forming, to mankind in all ages, and in every situation, an universal law of natural religion, no one who fairly consults his own feelings, or observes without prejudice what passes in the world, can entertain a doubt. We have, moreover, the testimony of the most authentic records to prove that, in order to confirm this natural law, and to support it by the weighty sanctions of future rewards and punishments, it pleased the Great Governor of the world to appoint a divine Messenger, Jesus Christ, to declare his will to mankind. Of every one who enjoys the benefits of christianity, it may
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be truly said, that the day-spring from on high hath visited him, to guide his feet into the way of peace.

No one then can, with the least shadow of reason, plead against Religion, that her laws are unsupported by authority. Nor can any one with truth assert, that our Maker burdens us with arbitrary injunctions, which can answer no other end, than to display his sovereignty. Such an objection might perhaps have been urged with some degree of reason against the costly and troublesome ceremonies with which false religion has in every age been encumbered. But the laws of pure and undefiled religion enjoin nothing which is either useless or trifling—nothing which does not approve itself to the natural dictates of the human mind—nothing which is not adapted to answer the most important purposes. Let any one, whose discernment of what is reasonable is most accurate, whose feelings of what is becoming are most lively, examine,

amine, with the strictest scrutiny, the particulars of that conduct which the laws of God require; and let him declare whether, in any single instance, they enjoin any thing which his understanding pronounces as unreasonable or absurd, or against which his sense of honour revolts as base and contemptible. Is there any thing incongruous or disgraceful in paying a tribute of homage and reverence to the Great Being who made us—in supplicating the favour of that Good Being, who gives us all we enjoy, and on whom we depend for the accomplishment of all our hopes? Where is the man who will maintain, that there is any thing which contradicts either his reason, or his feelings, in the laws of sobriety, equity, and charity? Is not the character of an honest and truly virtuous man an object of universal admiration and esteem? Who does not see, that it is far better and nobler, to render to every one his due, and to make ourselves acceptable and useful

useful to those around us, by a course of active services to our families and friends, our neighbourhood and our country, than to withhold from others their lawful claims, to be guilty of extortion, oppression, and cruelty, or to deal out our favours with a sparing hand and a reluctant mind? Who is not convinced, that it is wiser and more reputable, to be sober, chaste, temperate, diligent, and humble, than to have our characters stained with the contrary vices?

If this ground be acknowledged untenable, will it be pleaded that the requisitions of the divine laws are *irksome and unpleasant*?—It is impossible that they should appear in this light to any who have not depraved their feelings by a long course of vicious indulgences; and surely it is not more reasonable that their corrupted taste should be admitted as a measure of human enjoyment, than that a deaf man should be appealed to as a judge in music. Enjoyment depends in
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a great measure upon habit. Even among bad men, it is frequently seen, that that species of irregular indulgence, which is most pleasing to one man, would be insipid, or even disgusting, to another. Why then should not the good man be allowed his own peculiar taste? Why should he not be able to find more pleasure in the strict government of his passions, than the voluptuary in indulging them without controul? Multitudes there are, whose experience proves, that this plan of happiness is no chimerical project—who, by their habitual tranquillity and cheerfulness, manifest their entire satisfaction in the pleasures of religion. It is, indeed, evident, from the very nature of these emotions of the mind, which accompany the practice of religion, that it must be attended with delight. It is natural to the human mind, to be happy in the contemplation and love of that which is great and excellent, in the exercise of grateful, generous, and benevolent affections, and in

the steady pursuit of important objects. Even with respect to those duties which are attended with the greatest present difficulties, there is a satisfaction attending the consciousness of acting right, and a consolation arising from the prospect of a future recompence, which abundantly overbalances every present inconvenience. No one, therefore, can have reason to complain that the duties of religion are irksome, and the commandments of God grievous.

Still less can any one urge, as an objection against the laws of God, that they are unnecessary, and that obedience to them is unprofitable. Is it not the manifest tendency of obedience to the laws of God, to secure our present ease and comfort; to increase our mutual goodwill and social happiness; to improve us in those dispositions and habits, which are in their own nature most delightful and amiable; and to prepare us for the happiness of the future state? Is not the language of every prohibition, which our Maker hath laid upon us, simply

simply this ; “ Do thyself no harm ? ”
Let any one, after a fair examination of
the laws and restrictions of virtue, ho-
nestly say, whether it be possible to
avoid the evils incident to our nature, or
to attain the happiness which we are
formed capable of enjoying, without a
strict and persevering observance of them.
The truth unquestionably is, that our
wise and bountiful Creator hath allowed
us all the liberty, in the enjoyment of
the bounties of his providence, which we
ourselves, if we understood our own in-
terest, could desire ; and hath only for-
bidden that abuse, which would frustrate
the benevolent purpose for which they
were bestowed. When to this we add
the prospect of the glorious and everlast-
ing rewards of obedience, which are re-
served for good men in a future state,
and recollect, that godliness hath the
promise, not only of the life that now
is, but of that which is to come, no-
thing can be wanting to satisfy every
reasonable mind, that in keeping the com-
mands of God no man labours in vain.

If neither the authority, nor the reasonableness of the laws of religion can be questioned, nothing remains, which can possibly be urged against them, except it be, that they are *impracticable*.— This is an objection against religion, which has often been advanced by its enemies, and which some of its friends, from a mistaken zeal for the honour of God, have not scrupled to admit. But, far be it from God that he should do wickedly; and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity: far be it from the wise and righteous Governor of the world, that he should require from his creatures, as the only condition of his favour, a degree of excellence and perfection which it is impossible they should ever attain, or a freedom from vices to which they are impelled by irresistible necessity. God, who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are but dust, and who desireth not the death of a sinner, will certainly make all reasonable allowances for the general frailty of human nature, and for the particular circumstances

circumstances of disadvantage in which any individual may be placed, and will grant, to every man who sincerely endeavours to do his will, all necessary instruction and assistance. His gracious indulgence of our infirmities does not indeed extend so far as to leave any latitude for dishonesty, intemperance, licentiousness, or profaneness; because such a relaxation of the bonds of morality would defeat the first design of his laws, and open a door to disorder and misery of every kind. But where there is an habitual desire, and constant care, to live in the practice of every virtue, he mercifully accepts of our sincere penitence for our past errors, overlooks our present imperfections, and leaves us scope for continual advances towards perfection. The terms on which our Almighty Ruler offers to us the rewards of immortality are so far from being impracticable, that they are such as every one who was capable of judging wisely would choose for himself, if the choice were left in his

own hands : since the whole extent of them includes nothing more than a submission to those restrictions which are, in the nature of things, necessary to prevent our misery, and the observance of those rules by which alone we can be conducted to perfection and happiness.

On the whole, since it appears beyond all contradiction, from what has now been advanced, that the laws of religion rest upon the surest foundation of authority, that they are perfectly reasonable, and are with the highest wisdom adapted to promote our felicity ; and finally, that the acceptable observance of them lies within the compass of human ability ; it necessarily follows, that all the objections which the advocates of irreligion and licentiousness advance against a life of virtue and piety are mere aspersions ; and that we may reasonably conceive the Almighty as addressing all such persons in the language of the text : " O my people, what have I done unto you, and wherein have I wearied you ? testify against me."

When

When we hear men confidently exclaiming against religion, as an unreasonable, unmanly, and useless thing, we may conclude that they "know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm." Or, if their erroneous judgment must not be imputed to ignorance, we must ascribe it to a worse cause, culpable prejudice arising from criminal passions. Observing that the opinion, or at least the practice of multitudes, is on the side of vice, they hastily conclude that it is less dishonourable and less destructive, than has been commonly represented, without considering on how weak and inconclusive reasonings the opinion of the multitude is often built; without attending to the decisive arguments which the friends of religion offer in its defence. Or they are so disinclined to pay a strict regard to the laws of virtue and piety, that they shut their eyes against the light of conviction. In either case their conduct is highly culpable, and their judgment totally unworthy of regard.

Whatever

Whatever others may think or say of religion, let us, then, yield a constant and willing obedience to the laws of God. Notwithstanding the contempt with which many may be inclined to treat the strict and conscientious practice of virtue, let us persevere in this good path with unshaken resolution and unabating alacrity. Fully convinced, that to obey the law of God is to practise the art of leading a prudent, honourable, and happy life; and that, to pursue our own felicity and that of our brethren by the best possible means, that is, by keeping the commandments of God, is the highest wisdom; let us adopt the sentiments and the language of David: "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart: I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep all thy righteous judgments."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



